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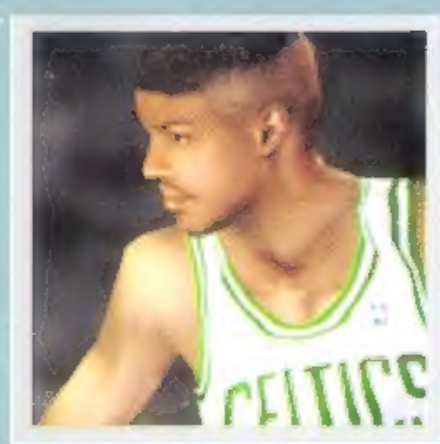

THE FIFTH ANNUAL

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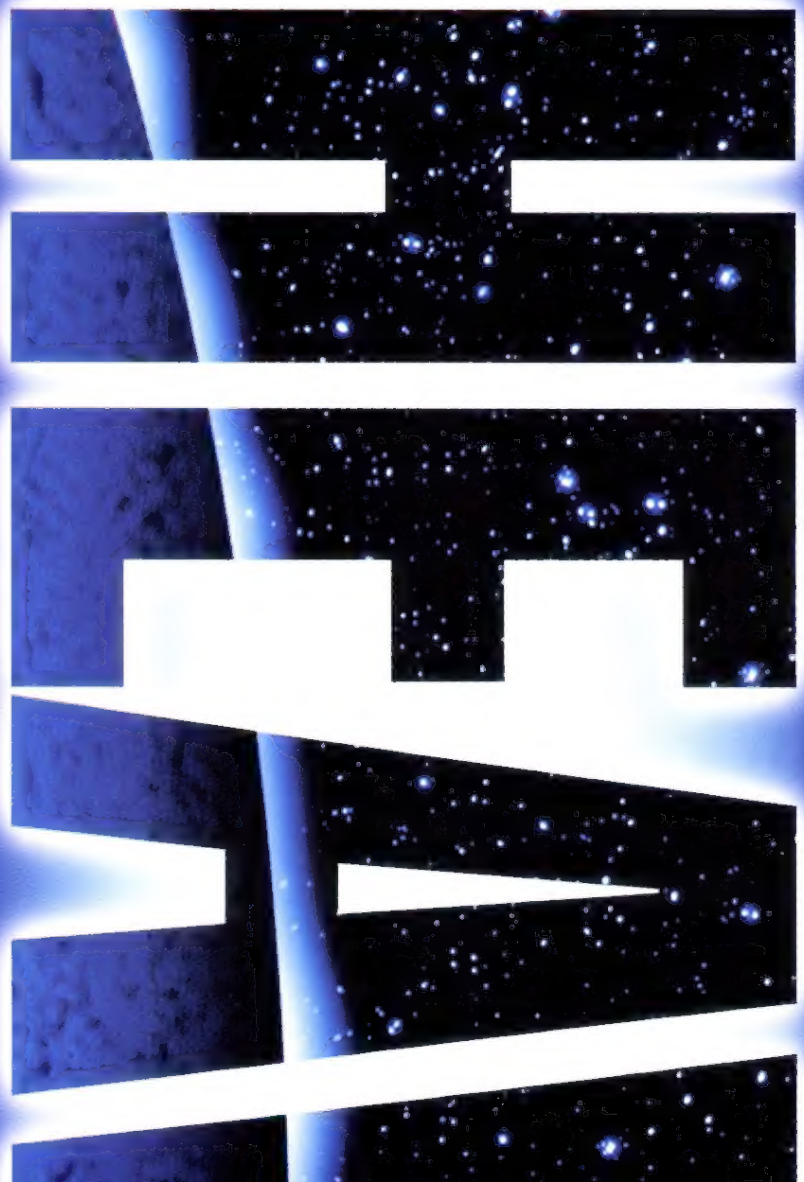

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PC GAMER

VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 3 • MARCH 1999

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Forget about the Oscars, the Grammies, or the, er, Codies; *these* are the only awards worth caring about. Now in their fifth great year, the *PC Gamer* Awards once again honor the very best in computer gaming.

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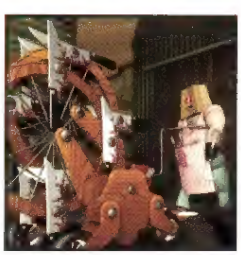

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http://pc.ign.com

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Tom looks at a couple of re-releases from Sierra and is happy to report that the games are now actually worth a good look.

179 **Multi-Play** — Jason Bates
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182 **The Killing Box** — Michael Luton
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And The Winner Is...

The *PC Gamer* editorial team always looks forward to our annual Awards with a sense of excitement... and trepidation. Never has such an opinionated bunch of grizzled gaming experts been assembled under one roof, and when we all pack into that stuffy little room with a pad and pencil (and copious supplies of junk food) to decide each year's winners, we know we're in for a good old ding-dong. For every category on which there's emphatic agreement, there's another which sparks furious debate — and this year was no exception.

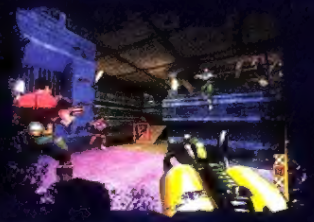
But the inevitable fist-fights and name-calling aside, the Awards also gives us a good opportunity to reflect on the high points of the past year, and I came away from this latest judging session with the overwhelming sense that 1998 really was a banner year for PC gaming — just look at how hotly contested many of this year's Awards categories were, and you'll see what I mean.

Deciding the Awards is a tough, protracted process, and we always leave that stuffy little room tired and emotional (and occasionally bruised) — but absolutely sure of two things: A) that our choices are the right ones, and; B) there will be plenty of *PC Gamer* readers out there who will be exercising their God-given right to disagree with them in the weeks and months ahead. We expect nothing less from you this year, and I look forward to hearing what you have to say about what we've picked as the Best of the Best. (Having said that, we've already set aside a garbage can called "The Loony Bin" for anyone who writes in to disagree with our choice for Game Of The Year...)

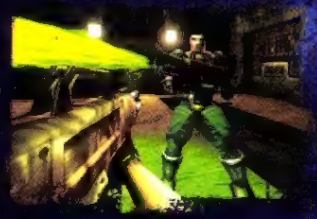
Gary Whitta, Editor-in-chief

Unreal™ TOURNAMENT™

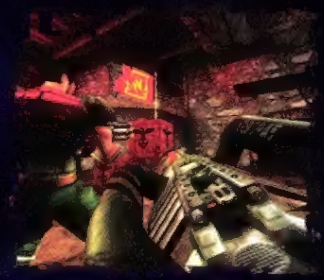
✧ Train for combat in Novice mode. Or go Hardcore for even more intense action.



✧ The most complete and challenging online multi-player experience ever.

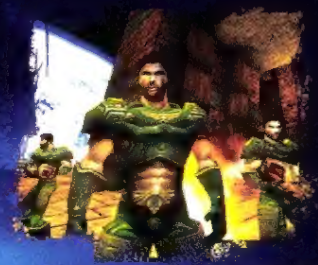


✧ All-new and enhanced big-bodycount weaponry - the Redeemer, the IMPACT Hammer and more.



✧ Completely customizable "bots" with superior A.I. -"bots" take orders and team up with you.

✧ Over 30 unique environments torqued by the Unreal engine.



✧ A single player experience like no other – Guide your team to the title of Unreal Grand Master!

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AND CLIMB TO THE TOP.
IN ENVIRONMENTS THAT STUN.
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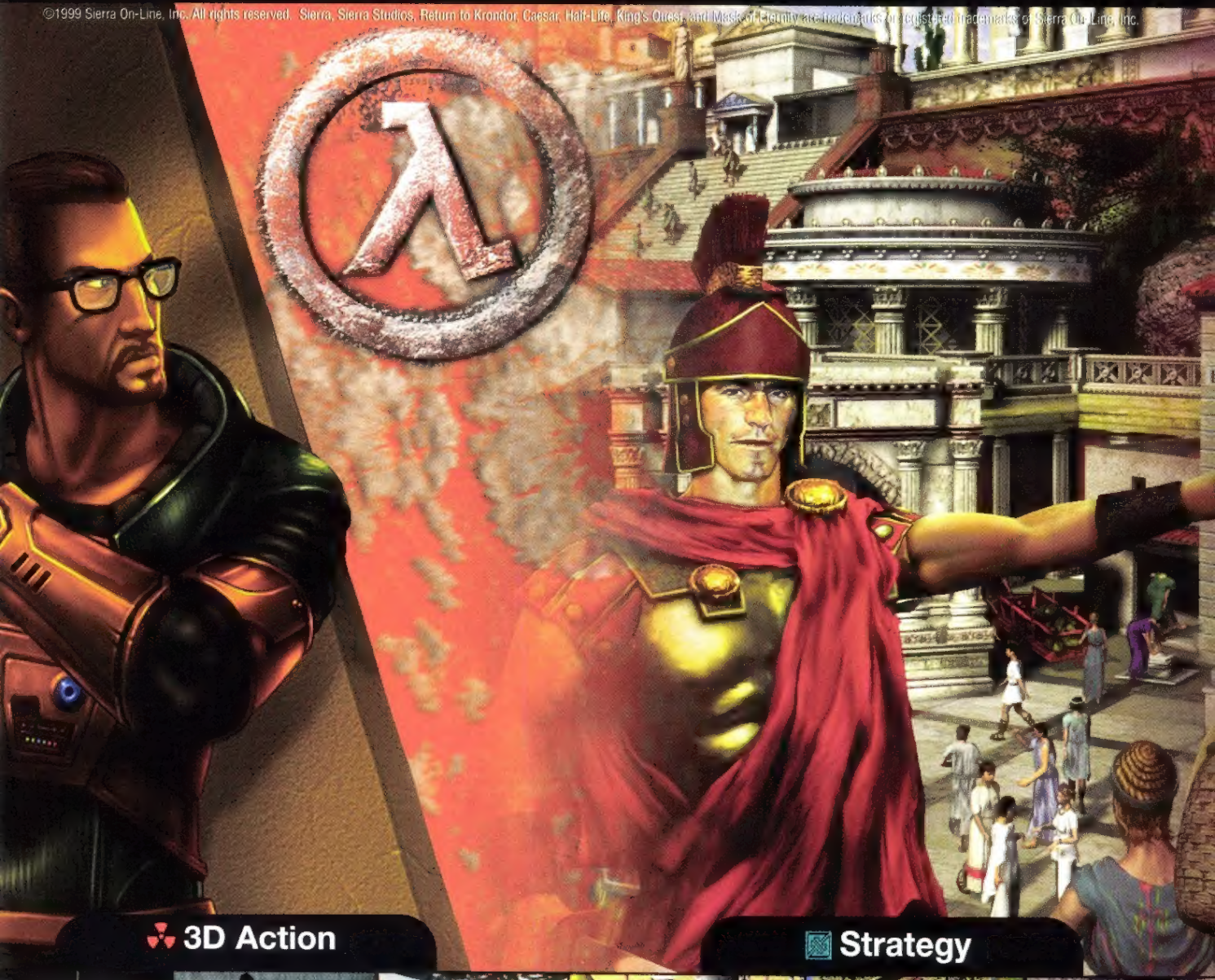
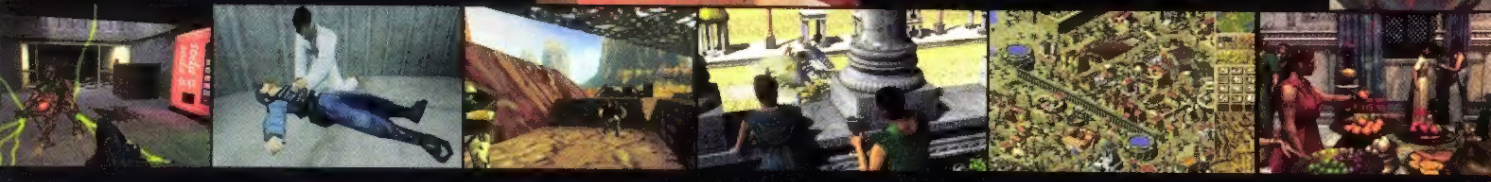
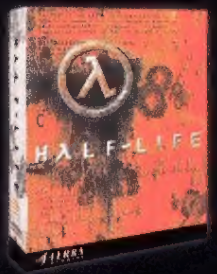


3D Action



"The most engrossing title of the year."
– PC Gamer

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE



HALF-LIFE™

Strategy

"Caesar III may well be Impressions' all-time masterpiece." 93% – PC Gamer

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CAESAR™ III

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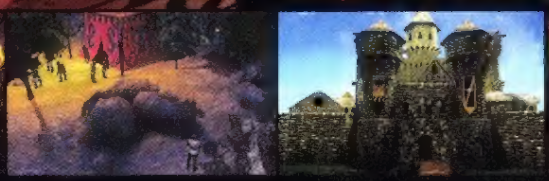
3D Adventure

Role Playing



"One of the year's biggest and most exciting new adventure games."

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Sneak. Hide. Lurk. Whack. Kill.

We've got some great demos lined up this month, including the demo for *Thief: The Dark Project*, a spiffy action-adventure that will have you creeping around, whacking guards over the head, hiding their unconscious bodies in dark corners — and completely rethinking the world of first-person shooters. Check it out.

Beyond that, we've got the demo for *Test Drive 5* (which features an exclusive *PC Gamer* car) as well a hands-on look at Roberta Williams' new adventure, *King's Quest: The Mask of Eternity*. And if you tire of those, you can do a little dinosaur hunting with *Carnivores*.

We've also got more exciting add-ons for games like *Duke Nukem 3D*, *StarCraft*, and *Quake II*. We haven't had the space lately to give you the details on all the latest add-ons, but they're all there in the ADDONS directory on *The CD*. Fire those babies up, and bring new life to your favorite games. And if there's a cool add-on you'd like to see on our disc, E-mail Billy "CD Whipping Boy" Harms at *bharms@pcgamer.com*, and he'll journey into the wilds of the 'net to track it down.

Quick Start for The CD

1. Insert the CD.
2. If Autorun does not start the CD, click the Start button and choose Run. Type *X:\PCGAMER.EXE* where *X* is the letter of your CD-ROM drive.
3. This will run *The CD*.

System Requirements

Windows 95; 486/33; 4MB RAM; Mouse

NOTE: These requirements are for loading our front-end program only. Each game demo will have its own additional requirements, so be sure to read them carefully.

Attention Win3.1 Users

The *PC Gamer* front end was created for Windows 95. If you run Windows 3.1, you will have to install Win 3.1 demos separately.

Get Demos for Free!

Newsstand buyers have the choice of purchasing either the CD-ROM Edition of *PC Gamer* or *PC Gamer* without a CD-ROM. If you purchase the edition without a disc, you can still get free game demos in a couple of different ways:

1. Download demos and check out the IGN PC web site at *http://pc.ign.com* on the Internet. Our own *PC Gamer* Online is now back at *http://www.pcgamer.com*.
2. If you are currently subscribed to the non-disc version of *PC Gamer* and wish to receive the CD or would like information about purchasing a CD, please call (800) 898-7159. Operators are standing by Monday through Friday: 6am to 9pm MT, and Saturday/Sunday: 9am to 4pm MT.

Disc Editors' Note

For the latest information on the *PC Gamer* CD, be sure to check our web site at *http://www.pcgamer.com/cdrom.html*. Also, please note that the demo of *Red Baron 3D* listed on the CD sleeve has been replaced with *Pro Pilot '99*.

CONTENTS / MANUAL INSTALLATION COMMANDS

Installation Shortcuts

In the event our interface doesn't load or run properly on your machine, you can still install each demo, bypassing our front end altogether.

To manually install a demo, take a look at the Command Box located to the right. This box contains a list of demos along with their directories and installation commands.

To get up and running using the Command Box, simply use the Start-Run command for Windows 95, or the File-Run command from the Program Manager for Windows 3.1. When the dialog box appears, type in the letter of your CD-ROM drive, followed by the directory and install command listed at the right.

For example, to install the *Thief: The Dark Project* demo type *X:\THIEFD.EXE* where *X* is the letter of your CD-ROM drive, and press Enter. The setup program for *Thief* will then run. You can also use the File Manager or Explorer to find the appropriate directory on *The CD*, and then double-click on the installation command.

Please remember that if you're using Windows 3.1, you cannot run most Windows 95 demos or our front end.

A lovely * symbol means that that demo requires DirectX in order to run. You can install DirectX by running the DXSETUP.EXE file in the \DIRECTX directory on *The CD*.

Demo	Directory	Install Command	Page	OS
Thief: The Dark Project*	\THIEF	THIEFD.EXE	10	WIN95
King's Quest*	\MASKDEMO	SETUP.EXE	15	WIN95
Test Drive 5*	\TD5DEMO	TD5DEMO.EXE	16	WIN95
Requiem*	\REQUIEM	REQDEMO.EXE	19	WIN95
Uprising 2*	\U2DEMO	UPRISING.EXE	20	WIN95
Warzone 2100*	\WZDEMO	WARZONEDEMOCD.EXE	20	WIN95
Carnivores*	\CARNDEMO	CARNIVORESDEMO.EXE	24	WIN95
Snow Wave*	\SNOWWAVE	SNOWWAVE.EXE	24	WIN95
Pro Pilot 99	\PP99DEMO	SETUP.EXE	25	WIN95
The 4th Coming	\T4CDEMO	T4CDEMO.EXE	25	WIN95
MindSpring	\MSPRING	SETUP.EXE	27	WIN95
EarthLink	\EARTHL	SETUP.EXE	27	WIN95
Patches	\PATCHES		177	
DirectX 6.0	\DIRECTX	DXSETUP.EXE		WIN95

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

Thief: The Dark Project

\THIEF\THIEF.EXE

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BY Action

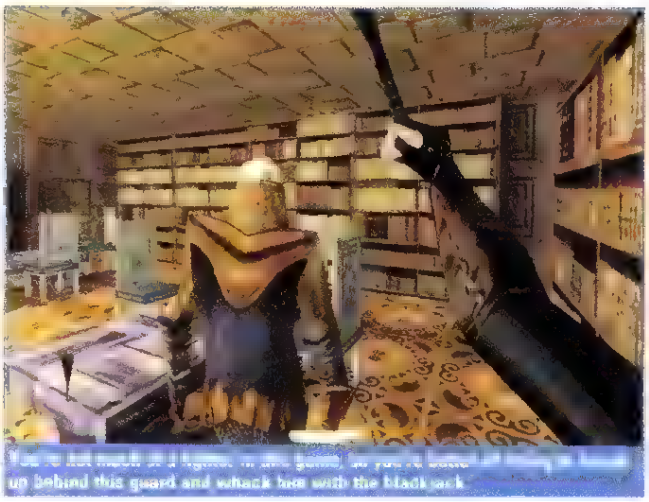
Eidos Interactive

Windows 95; Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard-drive space; 1MB SVGA video card; DirectX

Garrett is a thief living in an ancient city where magic and primitive technology coexist in an uneasy alliance. One day, he's recruited to join an ancient order of thieves. After receiving his training, he's sent out to steal some important stuff. Sounds simple — too bad there's more going on here that meets the eye.

The demo for *Thief: The Dark Project* lets you try on Garrett's shoes and see if you've got the goods to be sneaking around and stealing and such. After starting the demo, enter the Options area to access control, video, and audio options. The default controls are listed below, but if you want to make them more to your liking, just click on the Customize Controls button and enter your changes. After you're through with your fiddling, click Done.

Select New Game to get to the action. The demo features a training mission, as well as an abbreviated version of the first mission from the full game. One thing to keep in mind is that Garrett is not the best fighter in the world. While he can hold his own during brief battles, his real strength lies in his ability to move undetected and strike without warning. You will receive the proper training to utilize those skills, but once you enter the game level, put them to use. If you're forced to kill someone, pick the body up and hide it in a dark corner; if it's discovered, the alarm will sound and your goose will be cooked. Remember: the best weapon available to you is the element of surprise — sneak up behind the guards and whack 'em good with your blackjack. Only resort to using your sword if there are no other options available to you.



Use a lot much of a fighter in this game, as you're better off sneaking up behind this guard and whacking him with the blackjack.

One final thing to keep in mind is that different surfaces make different noises. Carpet is quiet, while wood and metal floors make noise, which will alert the guards to your presence. When traversing those surfaces, walk slowly. Also, you can use water arrows to extinguish wall torches and provide yourself with more darkness to cover your actions.

SPECIAL NOTE: The demo for *Thief: The Dark Project* does not install a shortcut on to your desktop. To play the game, you'll need to enter the demo's directory (the default is C:\thief) and double-click on thief.exe.

CONTROL KEYS

Move Forward	↑
Move Backward	↓
Turn Left	←
Turn Right	→
Look Up	page up
Look Down	page down
Lean Left	Q
Lean Right	E
Toggle Crouch	Enter
Attack	LEFT MOUSE BUTTON
Use Item	RIGHT MOUSE BUTTON

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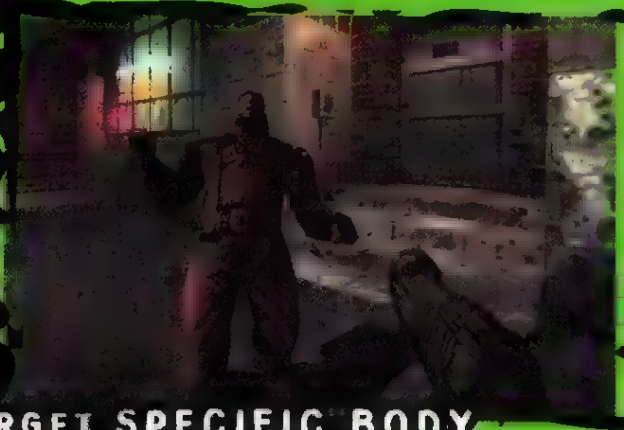

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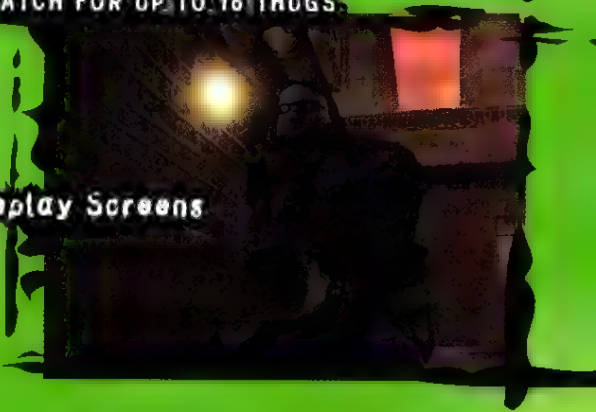

Actual Gameplay Screens

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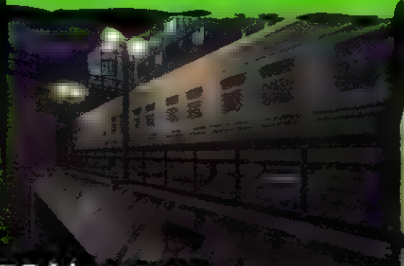

STEAL A BIKE OR HOP A TRAIN TO GET AROUND TOWN.

Actual Game Thug

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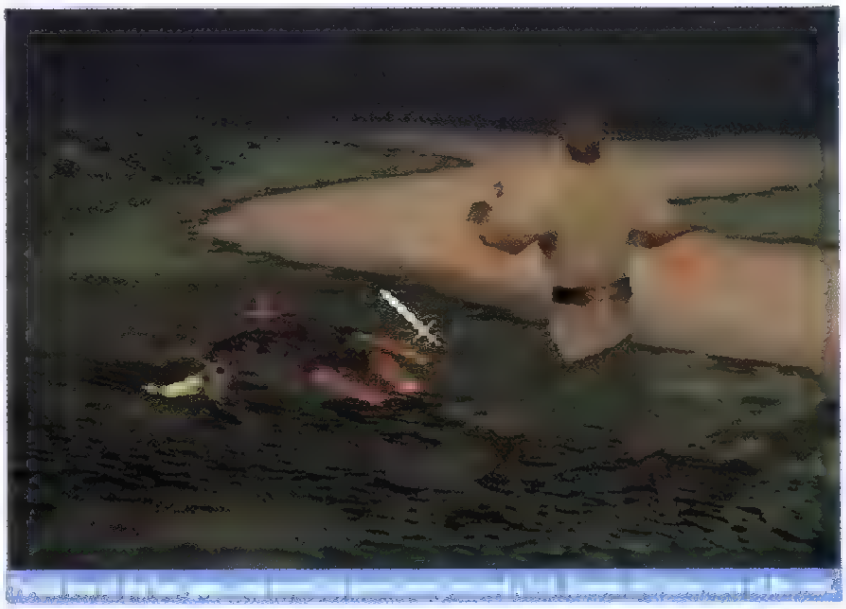
Acclaim
www.acclaim.net

King's Quest: Mask of Eternity

\MASKDEMO\SETUP.EXE
(206) 644-4343
Roleplaying
Sierra
Windows 95, Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space; DirectX, Mouse

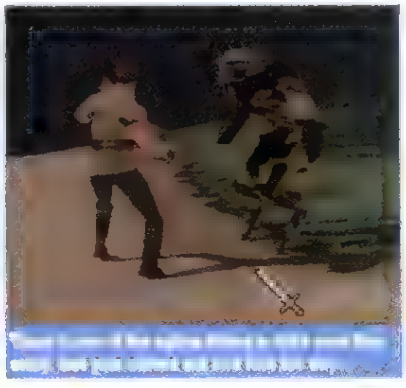


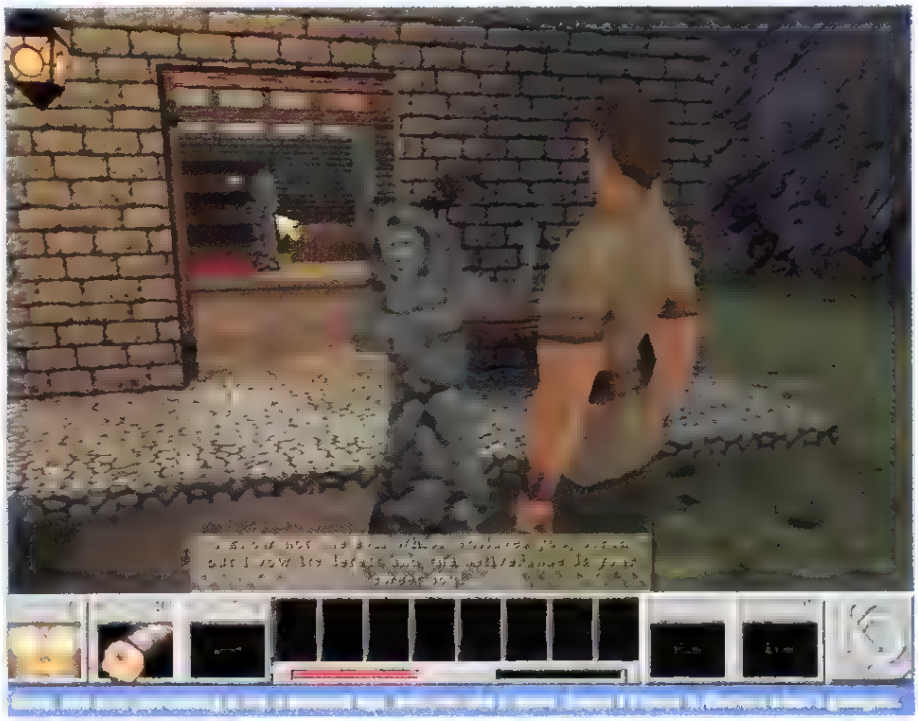
Things are going swimmingly in the kingdom of Daventry, and its people are digging life under the rule of King Graham — until an evil being shows up, shatters the Mask of Eternity into several pieces, and really puts a damper on the fun. A young fellow named Connor is hanging out as pieces of the Mask rain down from the sky. One of the pieces lands at Connor's feet, so he picks it up — and at that same moment, everyone else in the village is turned to stone. So, naturally, Connor must set out to right the wrongs and restore Daventry to its former glory.

Designed by the legendary Roberta Williams, the demo for *King's Quest: Mask of Eternity* lets you try out some of Connor's early adventuring. After watching the little intro movie (the one that shows everyone turning into stone), you take control of Connor. Use the control keys listed below to move and interact with the environment. You'll find you can pick up some of the objects you come across; simply move Connor over to the object and click on it with the mouse. When entering a building, it's a good idea to stand in one place and move the mouse across the room, looking for objects that may be up for grabs. Also, be selective when deciding what to take and what to leave behind. You don't want to be bogged down with a bunch of junk.

Along the way, you'll encounter villains looking to bash in your skull. To enter combat, click the sword icon on the bottom menu bar, the mouse cursor will now take the shape of a sword. Move the sword over the scum you wish to kill and click. You'll then engage in some skull-splitting fighting (with any luck, it'll be the other guy's skull splitting, not yours).

The demo will give you a good glimpse into the world of King's Quest. This adventure series has been around for ages now, so if you dig this demo, you may want to check out the older games, available at any software store.



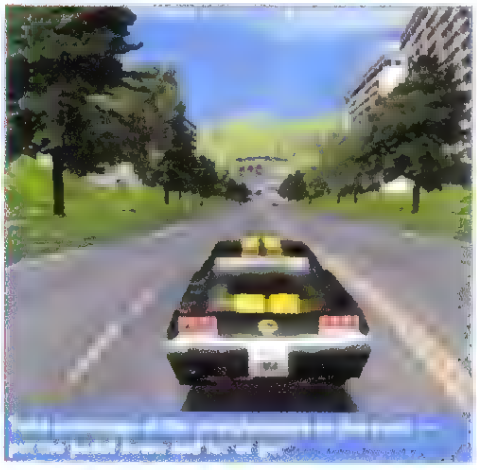


Test Drive 5

INSTALL \TD5DEMO\TD5DEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (408) 296-8400

CATEGORY **Racing**
COMPANY **Accolade**
REQUIRED **Windows 95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 15MB hard-drive space; DirectX**

Racing is cool. Whether you're on the 35th lap of the Daytona 500 or laying down some rubber in the funny car or outrunning a bunch of really angry cops on an old county road, there are few things that can compare with the feel of wind in your hair, bugs in your teeth, and bullets whizzing past your head. Racing is as American as apple pie, and don't let anyone te you different.



Once you get out in front of the main pack of competitors, you can drive a bit more conservatively.

With that in mind, we present to you the demo for *Test Drive 5*, the latest in Accolade's long-running racing franchise. The demo lets you take a spin in either a Dodge Viper or a special *PC Gamer* edition of the 1969 Chevy Camaro (not that we're biased or anything, but we think the Camaro will kick the Viper's tail any day of the week — and, failing that, it looks a lot cooler...).

After starting the demo (you can either play the software only or 3Dfx-accelerated version, based on what's installed on your machine), head into the Options menu. Game Options lets you tell the game whether or not you want cops and traffic present, and you can toggle the racing style (arcade or simulation) and the difficulty setting as well. Access the controls area and select whether or not you wish to control that Camaro with the keyboard or a gamepad. To set up different controls, click on the Configure button.

Once you're done with all that junk, you're ready to race. The race is timed (meaning there are checkpoints that must be passed), so don't walk the dog. Keep the pedal to metal, and if anyone gets in your way, well, let the insurance company sort it out and earn their money.

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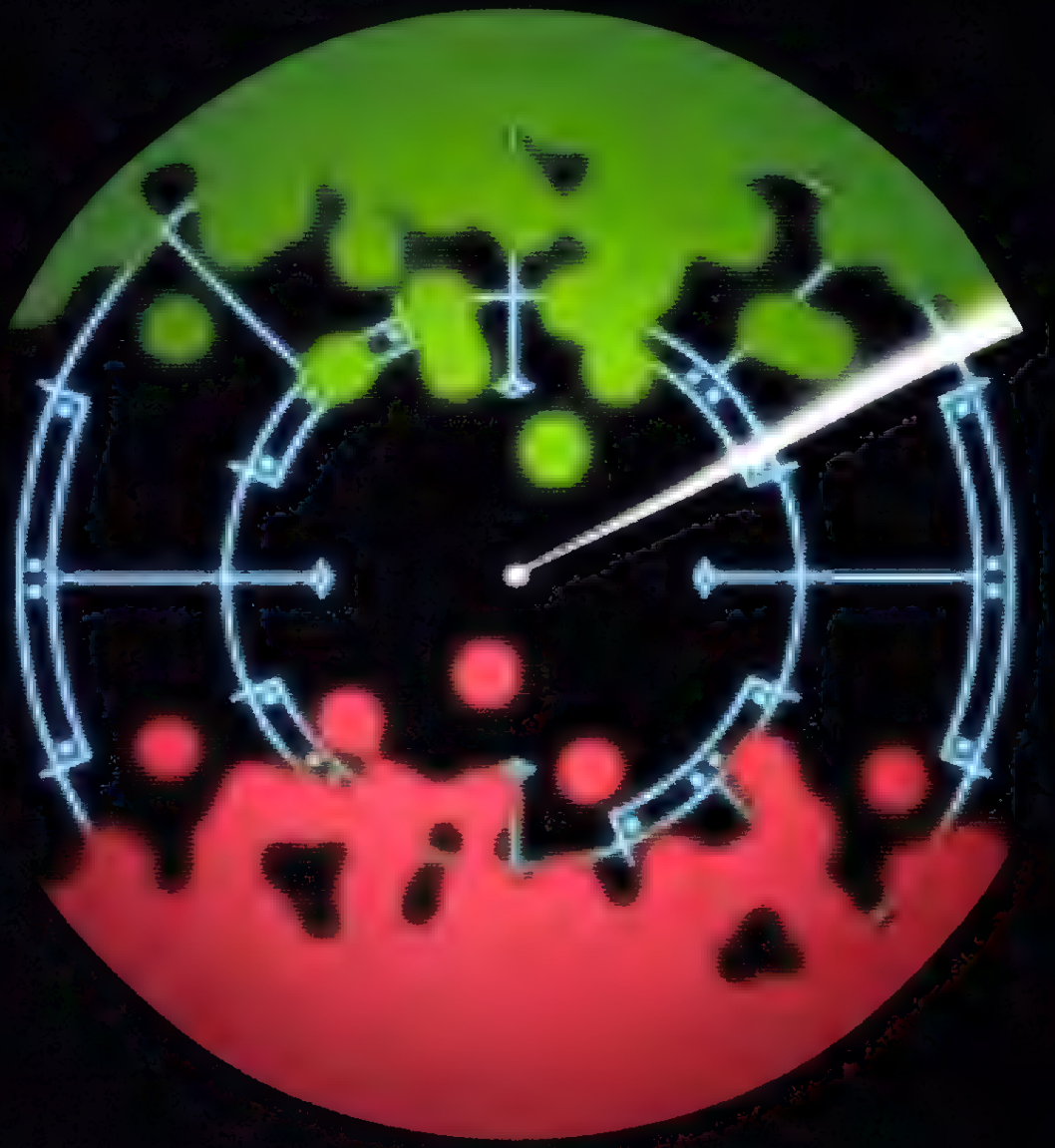

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Requiem: Avenging Angel

INSTALL \REQUIEM\REQDEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (650) 261-3454
CATEGORY Action
COMPANY 3DO
REQUIRED Windows 95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 108MB hard-drive space; 3Dfx-based video card; DirectX

There has been a second war in Heaven, and a group of rebellious angels known as the Fallen are heading to Earth to destroy mankind. (Now, why would they want to do that, when we're all so peaceful, so willing to do whatever it takes to help our fellow man, woman, or child?) In response to this, Heaven has dispatched Malachi, a loyal angel, to thwart the Fallen's plans. The battle will rage through Hell, Earth, and out into the depths of space — and it's not going to be pretty.

The demo for *Requiem: Avenging Angel* lets you try a bit of the action from the full game. Instead of journeying through a game level, however, you'll face off against one of the game's end bosses, who will throw a variety of demons and other assorted baddies your way.

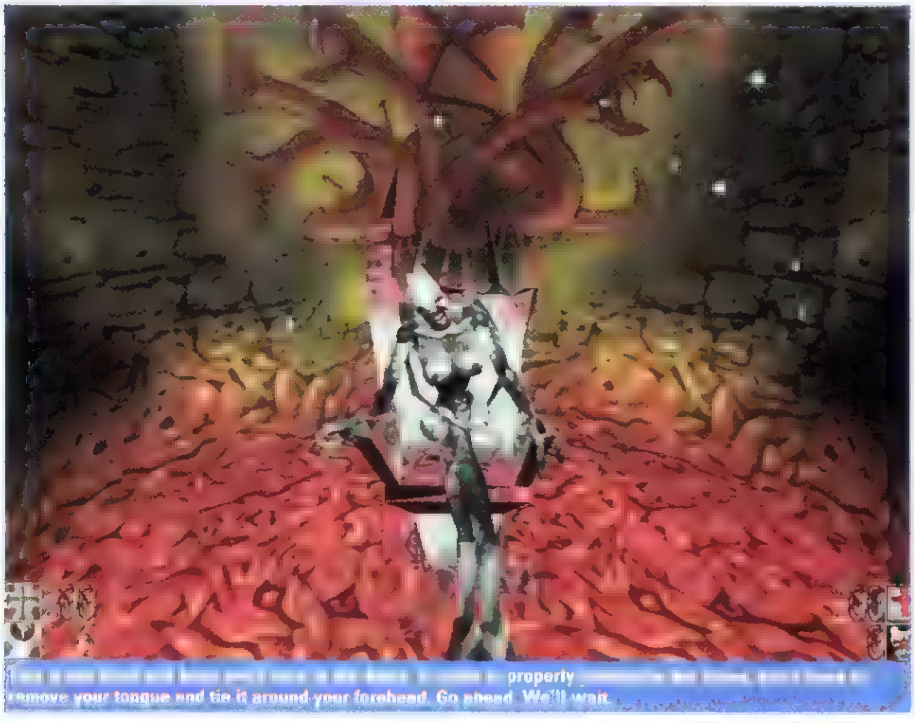
After starting the demo, enter the Options area to configure your video, audio, and control settings. If you change anything, click on the Save Config button and then on Default — that'll save your new configuration as the default, so you won't have to re-enter your choices every time you play the demo. Once those issues are settled, head into the demo by clicking New Game.

As mentioned, you'll face off against one of the big demons from the full version of the game. You have both angelic powers and traditional weapons like machine guns, and certain weapons will only work against certain creatures. We won't tell you what will kill who — figuring that out is part of the fun.

The full version of *Requiem* should be out early this year; it'll feature loads more levels, more weapons, and — of course — more bad people for you to kill.

SPECIAL NOTE: The demo for *Requiem: Avenging Angel* requires you to have a 3Dfx based video card installed in your PC. If you've got one, go kick some demon butt.

That's one mean-looking angel. Guess what — it's you! Check out those wings!



remove your tongue and tie it around your forehead. Go ahead. We'll wait.

CONTROL KEYS

Move Forward	E
Move Backward	D
Turn Left	S
Turn Right	F
Jump	Spacebar
Fire	LEFT MOUSE BUTTON
Powers/Weapons Menu	A
Cycle Through Powers	T
Cycle Through Weapons	W

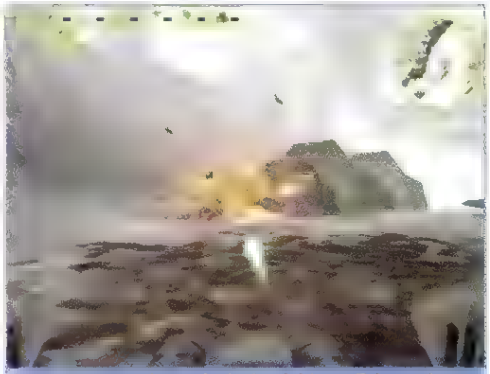
Uprising 2: Lead and Destroy

INSTALL \U2DEMO\UPRISING.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (650) 261-3454
CATEGORY Action
COMPANY 3DO
REQUIRED Windows 95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 46MB hard-drive space; 2MB SVGA video card, DirectX

In the first *Uprising*, you battled against the Imperium, a battle which you eventually won. Now you're the primary military force, inheritor of the human settlements scattered across the galaxy. You've now discovered that the reason you were able to defeat the Imperium is because they were fighting a two-sided war — against you and an alien race called the Trich. The Trich were never defeated and are quite anxious to devour the entire galaxy.

The demo for *Uprising 2: Lead and Destroy* lets you try out two levels from the full game. The first is a simple training mission that teaches you the ins and outs of playing the game, and the other is a live-fire exercise against the Trich. To get a handle on the game, we recommend that you complete the training mission.

If you've played the first *Uprising*, you pretty much know what to do. If not, a handy-dandy voice will provide mission instructions at the beginning of each level. Early on, your primary objective will be simply to destroy enemy targets — follow the waypoints and blast everything you come across. You have two modes of fire; save the missiles for the larger targets, or you may find yourself in a world of hurt.



Follow the nav points to find this mini-base. Take out its defenses, and then hit the structures.

CONTROL KEYS

Move Forward	W
Move Backward	S
Strafe Left	A
Strafe Right	D
Weapon 1	LEFT MOUSE BUTTON
Weapon 2	RIGHT MOUSE BUTTON
Overhead Map	M
Jump to Citadel	C
Speed Jets	Spacebar
Revive	ANY KEY
Change HUD Display	Backspace

Warzone 2100

INSTALL \WZDEMO\WARZONEDEMOCD.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (415) 547-1244
CATEGORY Strategy
COMPANY Eidos Interactive
REQUIRED Windows 95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 31MB hard-drive space, DirectX

Wargames have always been a hit with gamers. Whether they're die-hard historical games like *The Operational Art of War*, or fast-paced real-time strategy game like *Red Alert*, they provide us with a much-needed fix of armed conflict. Plus, there are no messy trivialities to deal with, such as objections from the United Nations or some 20-year-old treaty that should've never been ratified in the first place.

The fine folks at Eidos and Pumpkin Studios have teamed to create *Warzone 2100*. The demo gives you a small taste of the full game, which promises to feature 400 technologies and as many as 2,000 units. The demo takes place during the game's first campaign and lets you try a training mission and three combat missions.

The small menu in the left-hand bottom corner is where you [illegible] button to see what it does, then jump into the action.

The demo comes in three flavors: Direct3D accelerated, 3Dfx accelerated, or software-only rendering. Pick the one that matches what's under your PC's hood and jump into the game. An Options button lets you tweak things like difficulty, scroll speed, etc. To start the fun, click on Demo, which will give you the choice between Tutorial and Fast Play. The Tutorial will show you how to whomp some butt, while Fast Play takes you right to the action.

Once in the demo, you'll see your units and your base. On the bottom left of the screen are a series of menus; move the mouse over each selection to see what it does — build, design, etc.

As in all real-time strategy games, you'll need to manage resources while you wage war. Fiddle around with the game (or, better yet, complete the tutorial) until you know what needs to be done.

CONTROL KEYS

Open Console	~
Default Range	U
Short Range	O
Retreat at Medium Damage	V
Retreat at Heavy Damage	B
Never Retreat	I
Fire-at-Will	F
Engage/Return Fire	E
Cease Fire	C
Guard Position	G
Pursue	P
Patrol	Q
Stop	S

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"HEY BIG BOY, IS THAT AN AK-47 IN YOUR POCKET...?"

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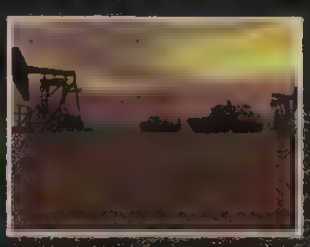

DIGITAL IMAGE DESIGN

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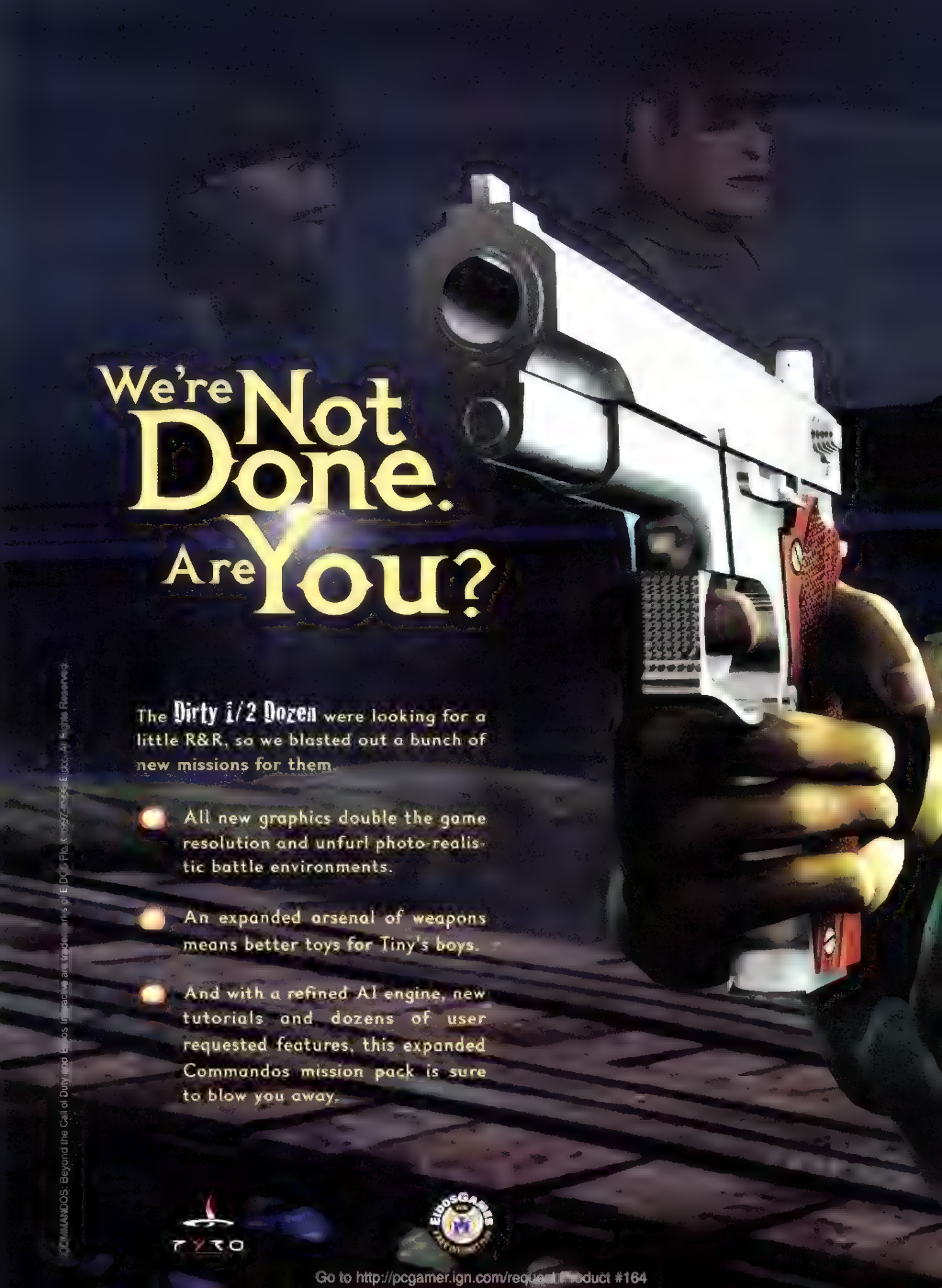
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Carnivores

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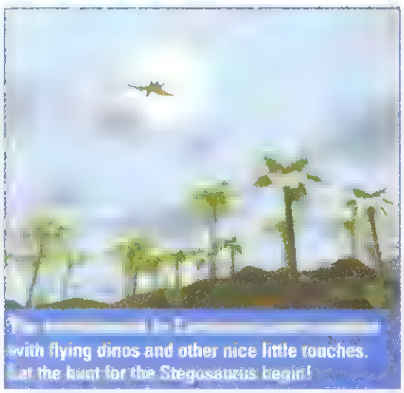
CATEGORY Hunting
COMPANY WizardWorks
REQUIRED Windows 95; Pentium 150; 16MB RAM; 45MB hard-drive space; DirectX; Mouse

In the year 2190 AD, a space vessel discovered a nifty little planet called FMM UV-32. The planet, while fully capable of supporting human life, was declared unfit to colonize due to its unstable terrain — oh, and because the place is packed to the gills with dinosaurs. A company bought the rights to the planet, and DinoHunt Corp. was founded. You are their newest client.

In *Carnivores*, the latest in a long line of hunting games, you get to journey off to FMM UV-32 and hunt those dinosaurs (probably because every living thing on Earth has been hunted into extinction). Start the demo up, enter the name of your hunter, and agree to the waiver, which basically says that if you're killed while hunting, your next of kin won't hold DinoHunt responsible.


with flying dinos and other nice little touches. Let the hunt for the Stegosaurus begin!

After you agree to that, start a new hunt. The demo lets you go after the mighty Stegosaurus, armed with the shotgun.

If you've played other hunting games, you already know the score. *Carnivores* is a bit different, however, in that you can die. That's right — the dinos bite back. You need to keep your eyes open all the time, because while you're hunting Steggy, the neighborhood raptor just might be hunting you.

CONTROL KEYS

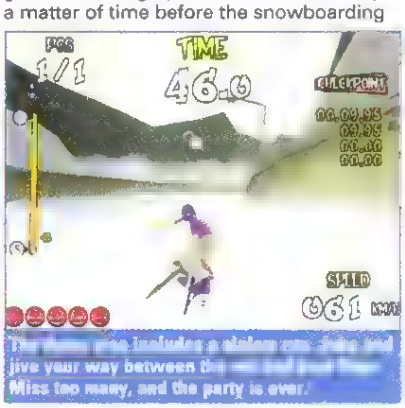
Move Forward	A
Move Backward	Z
Turn Up	↑
Turn Down	↓
Turn Left	←
Turn Right	→
Fire	LEFT MOUSE BUTTON
Get Weapon	RIGHT MOUSE BUTTON
Jump	Spacebar
Run	Shift
Crouch	X
Call	Alt
Binoculars	B

You can shoot all the animals you come across, but make sure you carefully watch your ammunition. The final version lets you hunt all sorts of other dinos, and also gives you access to more weapons.

Snow Wave

INSTALL \SNOWWAVE\SNOWWAVE.EXE
TECH SUPPORT estudios@hammert.com
CATEGORY Arcade
COMPANY Intense Games
REQUIRED Windows 95; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; DirectX

Once the pariahs of slopes everywhere, snowboarding is now an accepted sport. Sure, it still clings to its roots within the skateboarding community via the baggy pants, wallet chains, and funky shirts, but the action is real. And with more and more winter-based sports games showing up on the PC, it was only a matter of time before the snowboarding games started arriving, too.



Miss too many, and the party is over.

The demo for *Snow Wave* lets you try out some of the action. After launching the demo, you must pick your preferred language before proceeding. Once that's done, you'll arrive at the main menu. The demo only allows two types of races — the Border Cross and the Big Jump. The Border Cross is a slalom event, while the Big Jump is just what it sounds like — a big jump. To successfully complete the Border Cross, you'll need to be able to turn on a dime and increase and decrease your speed at any time. This will take a bit of practice, so don't get flustered if you have a rough going in the beginning. The Big Jump is just a long slope, with ramps on either side. The rest should be self-explanatory.

Hit the ramps on either side to catch the big air. Do you play it safe, or go for the big points?

Now get out there and irritate some skiers! And watch out for trees — we don't want you to get hurt when you're going for the big points.

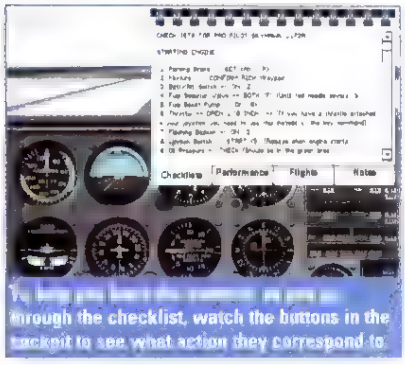
SPECIAL NOTE: The demo for *Snow Wave* runs directly off the CD, so you'll have to have the disc in your CD-ROM drive to play. Makes sense, right?

http://pc.ign.com

Pro Pilot 99

INSTALL \PP99DEMO\SETUP.EXE
TECH SUPPORT (206) 644-4343
CATEGORY **Simulation**
COMPANY **Sierra**
REQUIRED **Windows 95; Pentium 133, 32MB RAM; 65MB hard-drive space; SVGA video card**

Flight sims have been a standard in PC gaming for many years. Since most folks lack The Right Stuff, they must be content with taking to the skies in a computer simulation. Sure, all the buttons and levers are authentic, but if you screw up, there's no pain and suffering. No muss, no fuss.



Through the checklist, watch the buttons in the cockpit to see what action they correspond to

With the demo for *Pro Pilot 99*, you can take off from LAX (that's Los Angeles International Airport in pilot talk) for a nice little afternoon flight. Like any flight sim worth its weight in luggage, *Pro Pilot 99* seeks to fully replicate every aspect of the flight process, from taking off to reaching cruising altitude to bringing that bucket of bolts down in one piece.

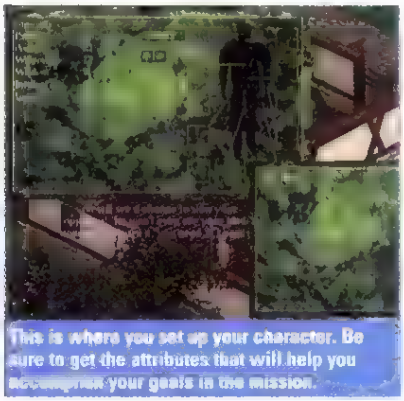
Is that a bus off in the distance? It's heading right for us!

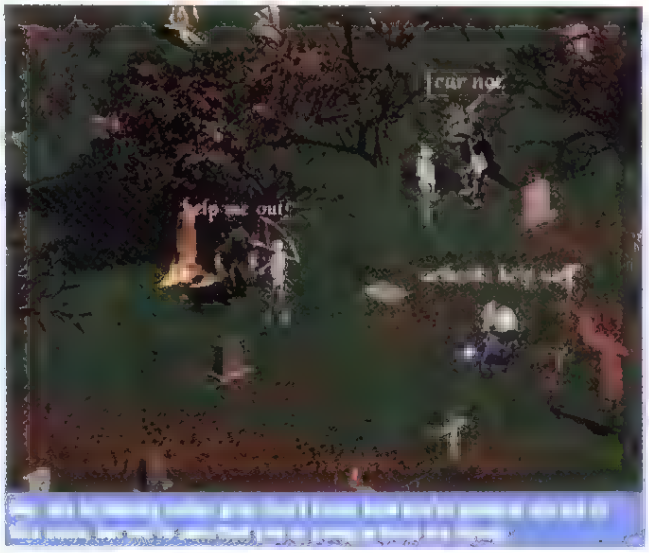
Getting into the air is very easy. Once you've started the demo, simply press F3 and a checklist will appear; this will show you, step-by-step, how to start your engines and take off. Before making a move, however, scroll down and familiarize yourself with what you're going to be doing. Once you feel comfortable, scroll back to the top and work your way down the list, following each step to the letter. In a few moments, you'll be airborne — enjoy the flight and the complimentary peanuts and soda. Be sure to put your tray table up!

The 4th Coming

INSTALL \T4CDEMO\T4CDEMO.EXE
TECH SUPPORT *www.t4c.com*
CATEGORY **Online Game**
COMPANY **Vircom**
REQUIRED **Windows 95; Pentium 90; 32MB RAM, 50MB hard-drive space; mouse; Internet connection**

There was a time, long ago, when Elves wandered the world in great numbers, when their achievements outshone even the brightness of the sun, when human and dwarven civilizations were still in their infancies. There was a time of legends and heroes, of incredible accomplishments and great deeds, a time when the world knew true grandeur. That time is long gone, however, crushed under the heel of fate and decay. The Elves are gone, now, victims to their own delusions. They failed to heed the warnings of the Harbinger, the one who came to warn them....


This is where you set up your character. Be sure to get the attributes that will help you accomplish your goals in the mission.



The demo for *The 4th Coming* lets you try out a bit of the action from this online roleplaying game for a limited time. After the demo expires, you'll need to download the full version (from *http://www.t4c.com*) to keep playing.

You will need to create a new account using the Create New Account key, and then you'll be allowed to log on. After logging on, click on Enter the Realms to create a new character, etc. You will then be asked four questions, which will help determine what kind of player you're going to be; following this, there will be a roll for attributes, which determine your character's strengths and weaknesses.

There is a lot involved with playing *The 4th Coming*, far too much to get into here. The demo does install help files, and there is also online assistance at the *4th Coming* web site (what's that address again? *http://www.t4c.com*).

SPECIAL NOTE: In order to play and enjoy *The 4th Coming*, you must have an Internet connection. You will be responsible for any Internet connection fees and any billing from your local phone company.

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Will you become the unlikely hero of the story, or merely another of its unfortunate casualties? Before you answer, the big guy here might have something to say about it.

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- Invoke [illegible] spells - Freeze enemies with an icy blast from a Cone of Cold, or [illegible] them with a searing stream of magical flame.
- Push your leadership skills to the limit as you guide a party of up to six characters, each with a personality that affects gameplay.
- Don't let your stubborn fighter [illegible] the arrogant [illegible] their teamwork in your next battle.
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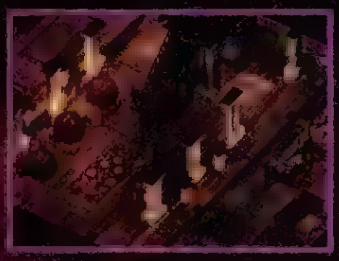

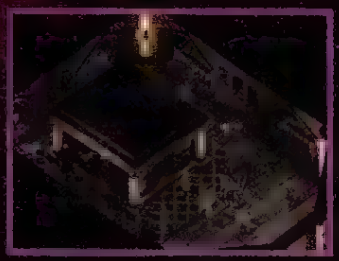

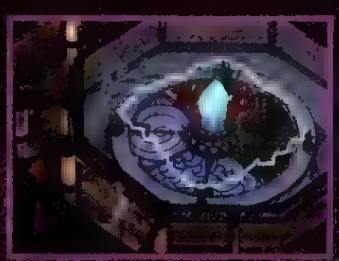

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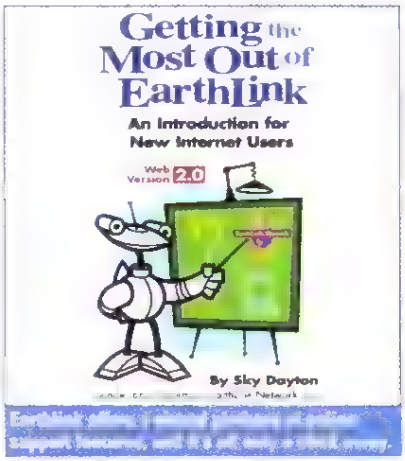

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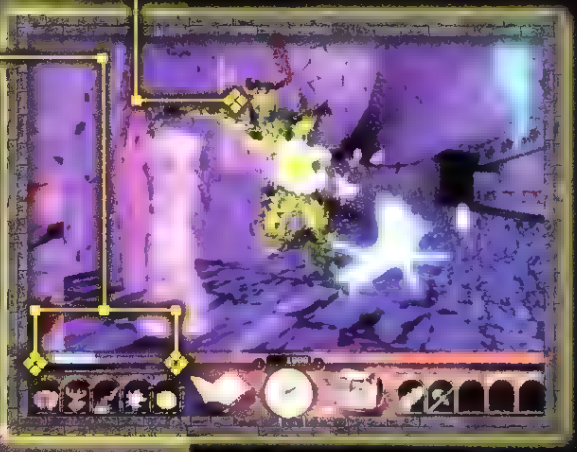

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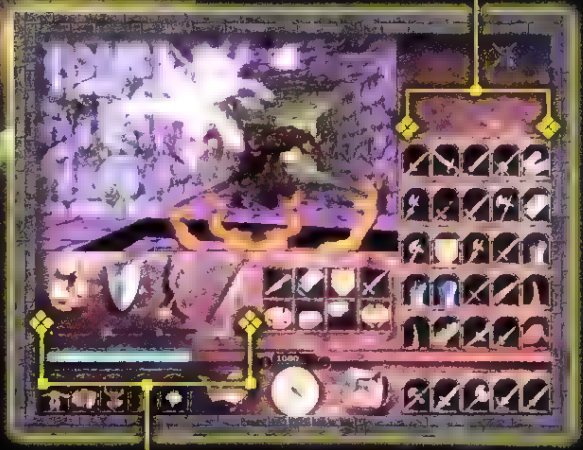

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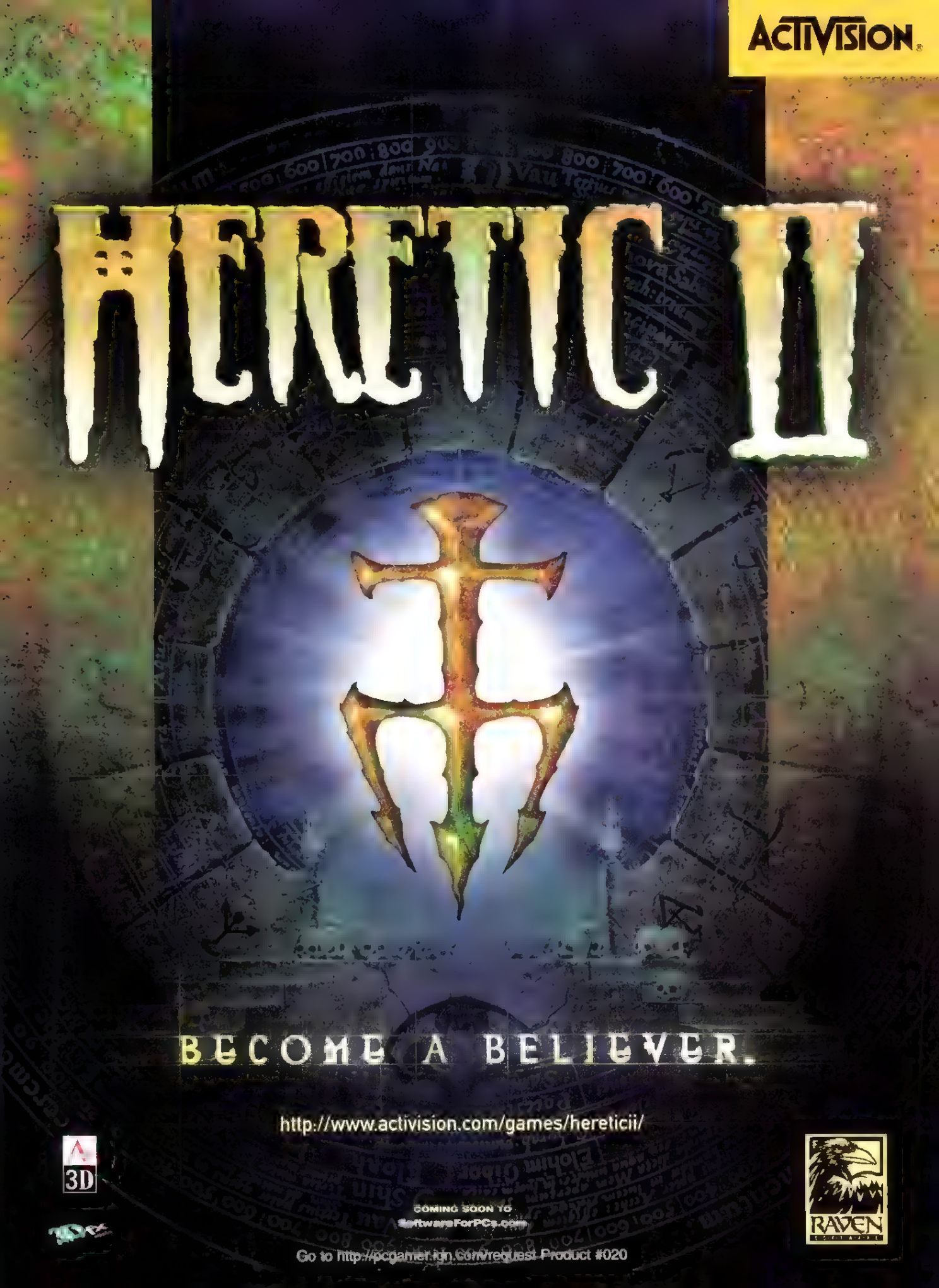
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Seven Kingdoms II

Once Fryhtan, twice shy!

The sleeper real-time strategy hit of 1997 returns bigger, badder, and more beautiful than ever, with some new features and plenty of nasty Fryhtans.

—T. Liam McDonald

Confession: If Trevor Chan's name had not been on the *Seven Kingdoms* box, I probably wouldn't have even loaded the game. It came in during a week in which every day brought a new, indistinguishable, and undistinguished real-time strategy game, and *7K* looked like another one for the pile. Little guys on a map with buildings: been there, done that, next.

But Chan had already made an impressive debut with *Capitalism*. Only dedicated business game fans would have called that challenging economic sim "fun," but it was a brilliant piece of programming and modeling. *Seven Kingdoms* warranted a look, and its mix of conquest, research, diplomacy, espionage, economics, religion, race, and exploration made it my favorite game of 1997. This wasn't just a real-time strategy game based on throwing as many units as possible at the other guy — it was a complex and meticulously balanced empire-builder that embraced all aspects of leadership and expansion. Elements had intricate inter-relationships. It took the best of real time strategy gaming, and the best of *Civilization*-style empire building, and mixed and enhanced them in a wholly unique way. It did everything *Age of Empires* tried to do, and with the exception of graphics, did it far better.

Fryhtans now have a more active role in *Seven Kingdoms II*. They are smart, organized, and aggressive. They are also butt ugly.

It took some time for *7K* to gather

Your kingdom will be attacked by both human and non-human opponents, but you mustn't let that distract you from the non-military aspects of leadership, such as economics and faith.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Real-time strategy
Developer: Enlight Studios
Publisher: Interactive Magic, (888) 746-2442
www.imagicgames.com
Percentage Complete: 70%

In a nutshell:

You get to control every aspect of a fledgling kingdom, playing as either human or monster. Spying, religion, combat, research, building, trade, production, and expansion are all part of the mix in this sequel to one of the best games of 1997.

What's so special?

Seven Kingdoms was a critical favorite for its rich strategic game elements. It created a real feel of roleplaying within a detailed conquest game, and ***Seven Kingdoms II*** expands and improves upon its many sublime joys.

And when's it coming out?

Summer

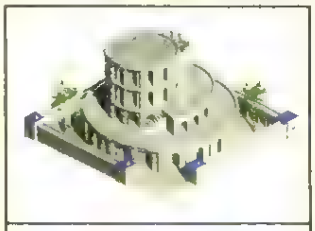
http://pc.ign.com

steam and earn its audience, but reviewers embraced it enthusiastically, and word of mouth spread via the Internet While it wasn't a smash, it did fair numbers and earned a loyal cult following. Now Chan and his Hong Kong-based Enlight Studios is taking *7K* to the next level with *Seven Kingdoms II: The Fryhtan Wars*: It's a complete overhaul of the original design that improves almost every aspect of the game.

Going into the sequel, Chan knew what would be kept and what would be changed from the original: "I wanted to create a gaming world where the player can go through the multi-faceted experience of being a king," he says. "Military conquest is merely one of the many key areas of concern in a king's agenda. An able king must also learn and master the fine art of keeping his people content and his generals loyal. A well developed economy can fuel a kingdom's expansion. Conversely, a kingdom in economic panic would often find itself on the verge of collapse. The diplomatic decisions that a king made would have strong implications on the balance of power. Clever use of espionage does not only foster collection of intelligence, but is also integral to achieving military excellence. Subduing and assimilating independent towns is a key strategy for rapid expansions," Chan says. "I like the way that different gameplay elements integrate and interact with each other. It really took workmanship and time to balance all these elements. Had any of them been less refined, the entire game could have been ruined. The graphics were the biggest aspect that I would have liked to improve [in the first game] but could not because of the limitation of resources and time. It also turned out to be the most criticized area of the game."

When a Fryhtan meets another Fryhtan a'comin' through the woods... all hell breaks loose. Fryhtans still live in hives, but they also venture out to eat humans and cause trouble.

The premise of *7KII* is the same as the original, with one notable exception — there is a new and more formidable threat from the Fryhtans, the hive-bound monsters of the original. Whereas in *7K* they were just there to be killed, they now have all the attributes and complexity of the human kingdoms, but with some drastic differences. They are actively seeking your destruction, and since you may now play as one of the Fryhtan races, you can fight humans. There's a big difference in play styles between humans and Fryhtans. As monsters, they are rewarded for killing civilians, rather than punished for it as human players are. They are also bred in lairs instead of conscripted from town, and don't care a bit about their "reputation."



Buildings are more detailed than in the original *7K* and more closely in scale to the units.

There are other, wide-spread changes that enhance gameplay, many based on user feedback. The most requested features have all been implemented: more buildings and research types, mounted units, formations, cooperative multi player, a scenario editor, and, of course, better graphics. Chan describes the scenario editor as "quite different from those found in other games as you can actually play it," he says. "As the game evolves, you will be able to pause it and add whatever you want before letting it run some more. In this way, you can build up a complex working world before saving it and trading it with your friends."

The most requested feature was better graphics, and Enlight Studios has responded with some amazing visuals. Buildings and units are larger and rendered in fine detail against a rolling 3D terrain. Resolutions up to 1024x768 are supported to help expand the viewing area, which was a bit cramped in the original. Units and buildings are now a bit closer to being in scale, and civilian and military units are more effectively differentiated. Overall, the game looks much, much better.

Twelve human races and seven Fryhtan are now offered, each with a unique unit, building, or both. In addition to the new Fryhtan units, there will be Egyptian chariots, Indian and Carthaginian elephants, Norman, Greek, Roman, and Mongol cavalry, Shao Lin monks, and Ninja warriors.

While *7K* only allowed you to research weapons, *7KII* expands the research element greatly, as Chan explains: "Now you will have a much wider range of projects which will enable the player to pick and choose according to his strategy," he says. "If a player plans to use only his men in battle, he can forget about weapons technology and concentrate on offensive or defensive advancements for his soldiers. If a player wants to make huge amounts of money so that he can concentrate on building a fine mercenary army, he should pay attention to mining and manufacturing technology which will enable him to make more money from his limited resources. A player who plans to field a huge army will need to research better farming methods so that he will have enough food to support his troops, as troops tend to defect to the opposition when their stomachs grow empty."

Despite all these enhancements, *Seven Kingdoms II* retains the core gameplay that engrossed so many fans. "The premise is pretty much the same as in *7K*," Chan says. "A game where human attributes such as leadership, skill, prejudice, tyranny, treachery and all the interactions between them are modeled. Where your units are not just mass-produced bunches of pixels that can be easily replaced as they are killed. We want the player to despair when an important soldier is killed and to rejoice when he comes through battle unharmed. We want them to shout, 'How dare they!' when one of their towns revolts against their unjust or inept rule. These are the kind of things that help to pull the player into the world and the kind of things that few, if any, other games have attempted to do."

Sounds good to us. Look for *7KII* this summer. PCG

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Midtown Madness

Get out of my way, jerk-ass!

Microsoft's successful racing series hits the traffic-jammed streets of the big city, courtesy of Angel Studios — Chicago pedestrians better watch out!

—Gary Whitta

Well, it's up to you — sit stuck behind this traffic, or go try out your car's suspension on Chicago's famous drawbridges up ahead? We trust you'll make the right choice.

FYI — FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Racing
Developer: Angel Studios
Publisher: Microsoft, (425) 882-8080
www.microsoft.com/games/
Percentage Complete: 75%

In a nutshell:

Midtown Madness breaks the monotony of circuit-based driving games by giving the player an entire city to race around in. A virtual rendering of the city of Chicago provides the backdrop for various kinds of racing, from simple checkpoint-hitting to "cops and robbers" chase scenarios. Or, simply explore the city at your leisure — causing a little commuter chaos along the way, perhaps.

What's so special?

Five different game types, full Internet play, lots of driveable vehicles ranging from sports cars and school buses to semi trucks, and some awesome 3D-accelerated visuals should help this one stand out from the pack.

And when's it coming out?

June

If you've ever been trapped in a big-city traffic jam and wished you could just plough right on through all that backed-up traffic, giving the cops the finger along the way, Microsoft has a game in development that should be right up your street. After two big-selling Monster Truck Madness titles and the award winning *Motocross Madness*, *Midtown Madness* is the latest addition to Microsoft's popular racing-game franchise — and it's a frustrated commuter's dream. Players will race not around predictable circuits as in the Need for Speed or Test Drive games — *Midtown Madness*' action takes place inside a realistically modelled city, complete with alleyways, side streets, crosswalks, pedestrians, parks, traffic lights and cops.

According to Clint Keith, the game's project director, the idea for a chaotic, traffic-filled racing game set in a "real" city first occurred to two Microsoft employees as they were trying to cross a busy Paris street. They took their kernel of an idea to developer Angel Studios, which was pitching its 3D vehicle simulation engine to the company at the time. "At first we were a little hesitant," says Keith. "We wanted our first PC game to push the boundaries of simulated vehicle racing, but the requirement to build a 'living city' — complete with people and traffic — seemed too large a challenge to pull off while looking great. But we jumped right in and have been able to build that living city, without comprising the simulation experience."

The "living city" in which *Midtown Madness* racers will drive is actually a virtual rendering of Chicago — Angel Studios chose the city because it's been the location of so many famous movie car chases, from *The French Connection* to *The Blues Brothers*. "Some of the more memorable car chase scenes have taken place under the El-train and other notable landmarks," says Keith. "Who can look at the drawbridges over the Chicago River and not see cars jumping them? It also seemed fitting to start what we hoped

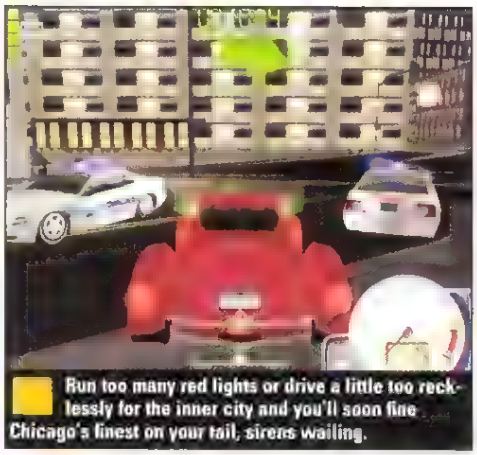
http://pc.ign.com

would be a continuous series of games where the most popular sim game, *Microsoft Flight Simulator*, started."

So, how convincing is this virtual Chicago? "We've incorporated many of the landmarks you would see in Chicago," says Keith. "We even had Chicago residents test *Midtown*, and they were blown away by how real it was. The landmarks cover more than 40 miles of central Chicago streets. *Midtown*'s Chicago isn't an exact replica for example, Wrigley Field is only a few miles away from Soldier Field, and a highway rings the exterior of the city so it might look strange to the native Chicago resident, but it adds a lot to the gameplay. You realize how incredibly realistic this city is when you look down the Miracle Mile and see everything!"

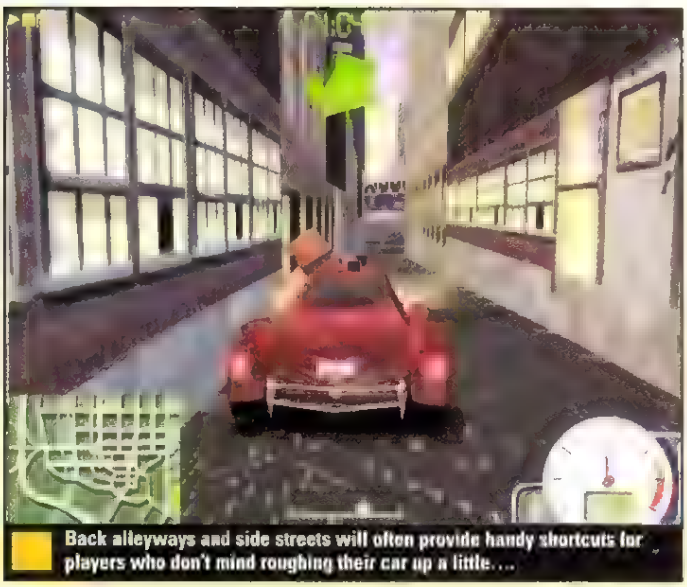
The biggest gameplay innovation in *Midtown Madness* is the freedom it gives the player. You're not "stuck" on a pre-defined circuit — the entire city is yours to explore, in whatever manner you see fit. Angel Studios calls this concept "open racing" — you still have checkpoints to hit and deadlines to meet, but you don't have to follow the standard A-to-B-to-C route to do it. "One of the main reasons track-based racing has been so dominant is that it's much easier to render a tunnel or track," says Keith. "Many racing sports are restricted to tracks in real life, but the 'Madness' concept really requires you to let the players make their own path. We fully expect people to discover things about the city and shortcuts to win races that we didn't think about."

Trying to shave a few minutes off your rush-hour commute home can result in needing an expensive paint job.



Run too many red lights or drive a little too recklessly for the inner city and you'll soon fine Chicago's finest on your tail, sirens wailing.

Midtown Madness features four types of racing: Blitz (get from point A to point B as quickly as possible), Checkpoint (race computer opponents through a series of checkpoints strewn around the city), Circuit (the most traditional game type: certain streets are blocked off to create a racing circuit within the city) and, perhaps most interestingly, Cops and Robbers. This mode is being created as a multi-player-only component, and is currently the developers' favorite game type. "This mode turned out to be so fun to create with our physics engine that we added more elements to it," says Keith. "The game now includes 'robber-versus-robber' teams and free-for-all modes that play like Capture the Flag. It's ten times as much fun as it originally was. By making Cops and Robbers more open and adjustable by the players, we found that we were inventing our own games and tactics to win. On one particular occasion, we had all the best drivers on one side, but the other side came up with a strategy of using a semi truck, a bus, and two fast cars. The bus would guard the other team's hideout to block them from retrieving the gold, and the semi would make a dash to grab it," he says. "Meanwhile, the two remaining players in their fast cars stalled the other team while the semi raced to pick up the gold. The stall tactic worked and the semi got to the gold first. The semi was so massive that none of the other team's sports cars could knock its gold loose. The semi was able to return the gold to the hideout and that team won. This kind of squad tactic worked great and added a lot to the experience."



Back alleyways and side streets will often provide handy shortcuts for players who don't mind roughing their car up a little....

Midtown Madness will feature a host of different cars to drive, including the aforementioned buses and freightliner trucks ("The bus was a stand in until we found in play testing that everyone wanted to drive a bus like a maniac through traffic, so we kept it in and added some audio that the passengers on such an ill-fated bus ride might sound like," says Keith), and negotiations are currently underway to add a few more real-life vehicles to the line-up, including Ford's 1999 Mustang and the F350 pick up. But no matter what you're driving, you're going to have to learn the ebb and flow of the city if you're going to hit those checkpoints in time. "Cars stop at red lights and use their turn lights — it helps you to decide if you can pass them or not," says Keith. "If you push them, they stop, put their emergency lights on, and later go back into traffic! It sounds crazy, but it's an essential part of the gameplay. They avoid accidents if possible, and will pile up to form traffic jams if an intersection is blocked. The goal is to make you feel like you're in a real city. We wanted players to react instinctively to real situations."

You'll be able to indulge in plenty of car nage in *Midtown Madness*, but the game stops just short of encouraging hit-and-run antics. "Microsoft said from the start that they didn't want people run over in *Midtown*, and we were happy to oblige," says Keith. "Obviously we wanted people in a city, but had to be careful how they looked and reacted to the cars. We experimented with 2D pedestrians, but they turned out to be too fake looking, and they had to get out of your way far in advance of the car in order to not appear that flat or pixelated. We finally wound up modeling 3D pedestrians and animating their motions. The result is pedestrians that can dive and jump at the last moment. We've also added some creative yelling, which was a very fun addition. Of course, 3D pedestrians get a bit expensive to draw, especially when a crowd forms, so we made sure they didn't have a major impact on gameplay. As a result, the players with low-end machines can turn them off to speed up their framerate."

According to Angel Studios, *Midtown Madness* will not require 3D acceleration and will run on a P-166 at a "decent framerate." The game is scheduled to release in June, and it should be interesting to see how it stacks up against GT Interactive's *Driver* (previewed last month), which also features city-based "open racing" but with a more crime based approach to gameplay.

PCG

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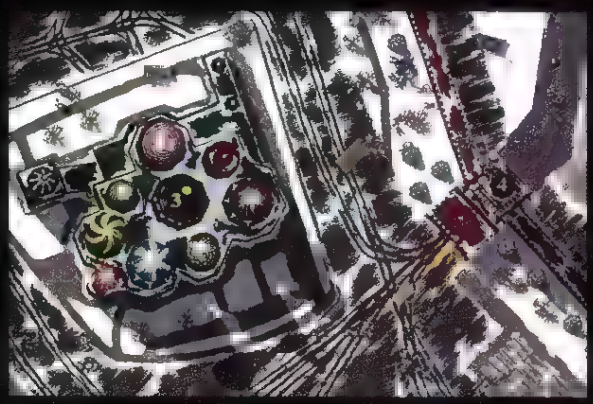
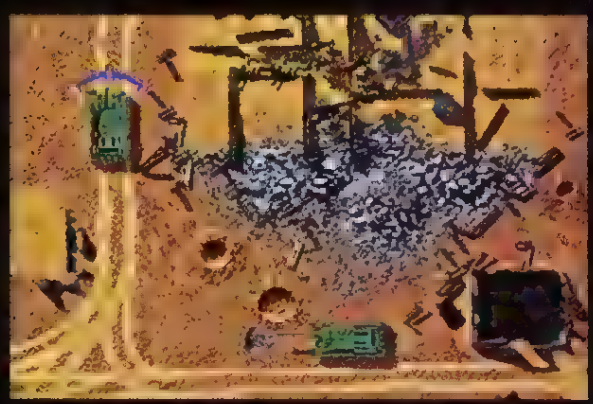


As the war drags on, the technology gets better. You can choose between rocket artillery, off-map artillery, flamethrowers and 80 different vehicles, to name just a few. Not to mention over 300 squad types and 60 different kinds of soldiers.



Take your troops from the open field tundra to Berlin. Maps are bigger and based on actual aerial photographs with amazingly accurate elevation detail. The maps may be historic, but the outcome of the war is unwritten. Will history repeat itself?

CLOSE COMBAT II

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www.microsoft.com/games/closecombat

Street Wars

Extortion has never been so much fun!

Studio 3 lets loose a gangster strategy title that pulls out *all* the stops, including psychos with chain-saws, hoods from pool halls, and vicars who extort money.

—Colin Williamson

FYI
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Category: Strategy
Developer: Studio 3
Publisher: Studio 3, +44 181 863 5056
www.studio3.co.uk
Percentage Complete: 80%

In a nutshell:

Street Wars **is a strategy title that combines the world-building fun of *SimCity* with the extortion and corruption found in any great gangster flick. From speakeasies to houses of ill repute, you have everything it takes to create your very own urban nightmare.**

What's so special?

Street Wars' **easy-to-learn tutorial system should ease most gamers right into a criminal world of wheeling and dealing. And don't forget the loads of dark humor, and a definite lack of political correctness — actually, we reckon it's what Eidos' *Gangsters* should have been.**

And when's it coming out?

April

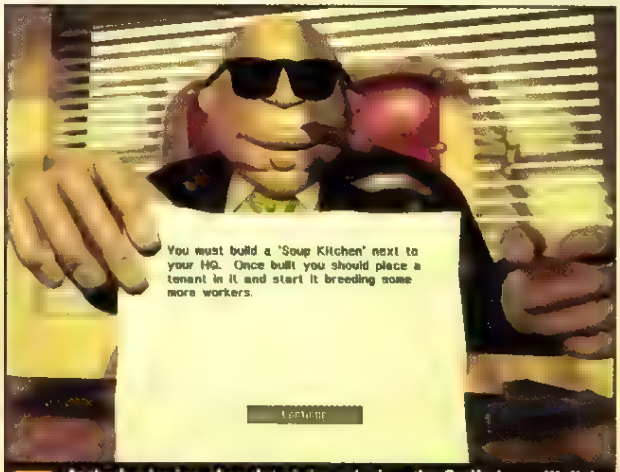
The name System 3 should be familiar to any old-school gamer who cut his teeth on the Atari ST, Amiga, or Commodore 64 System 3 was the development group responsible for such hits as Epyx's *World Championship Karate* and Activision's *The Last Ninja*. After regrouping as Studio 3 in the early 1990s, the company produced the successful god-sim, *Constructor*. Now, the London-based programming group is slaving away at a darker take on the city-building theme, in the form of *Street Wars: Constructor Underworld*.

Aside from Cinemaware's classic *The King of Chicago*, Melbourne House's 8-bit *Mugsy*, and Eidos' *Gangsters*, the organized crime genre is one that's been seriously overlooked, and Studio 3 hopes to redress that balance. "*Street Wars* offers something that's far more different than other god sims in the marketplace," says Mark Cale, the game's designer. "The gameplay elements make it a very good god-sim based around gangsters, but it's been done in the correct way — it's not serious, it's not promoting crime in a negative sense."

Once you've constructed a bordello, you can parade dancing hookers out into the street to distract your opponents while you torch their houses or pop their friends.

One of the best things about *Street Wars* is how it gradually leads you through the game's interface and introduces you to numerous features. "You're taken into a tutorial, and the godfather tells you what to do," says Cale. "As you do small tasks, he congratulates you and gets you back into the game with new tasks to do. You don't have to study a big manual. You can pick up and play it. Time is very precious these days, so if you can hold someone's hand into it from the start, people are going to have a very strong opinion about the game early on."

Cale's team will maintain a quick gameplay pace by keeping each mission relatively short. Each mission takes place in one of five populated areas — from the placid back-country worlds of Hicktown and Desert Springs to the bustling streets of Chicago. "You start off and work your way up through Vegas, Chicago, and New York, and the ultimate goal is to become the Godfather of the United States," says Cale.


You must build a 'Soup Kitchen' next to your HQ. Once built you should place a tenant in it and start it breeding some more workers.

At the beginning of each training mission, the Godfather will dish out easy-to-follow instructions. Do as he says, and you won't find a decapitated horse-head next to you when you wake up in the morning.

Each of the game's five levels includes ten missions, plus ten additional tutorial missions from the get-go. You've been given a full roster of shady charac-

http://pc gn com

ters who are ready to do your naughty bidding. Your three core workers include typical thugs with baseball bats, repairmen who assist in fixing damaged buildings, and Tommy Gun-wielding gangsters who attack and destroy anything in their path. But starting small is the key, and you'll have to kick off your international crime empire with a simple series of soup kitchens.

The balance of power is determined by the number of buildings in your possession. These can be built from scratch, taken over from other groups, or stolen from City Hall itself. You can attempt to capture a building by tossing several of your workers at it, who will begin frantically whacking away at the building's perimeter until they get through. And if you find that a certain enemy building is putting up too much resistance, you can always firebomb it and send in gangsters to destroy the rest. Resources pending, you'll be able to upgrade each building to three stories high, and increase its reputation — for example, a peep show can be upgraded to a strip joint, then renovated into a full-fledged Burlesque theatre. "As you progress through the game and you upgrade, you find that there are more buildings available with better businesses," says Cale. "Then you get more income — there are drunks and punks on the street, so you have to knock them out, drop them into your soup kitchens and drinking dens, and they start working for you. So then you build peep-shows so they spend *their* money on that. You're essentially building up this urban nightmare."

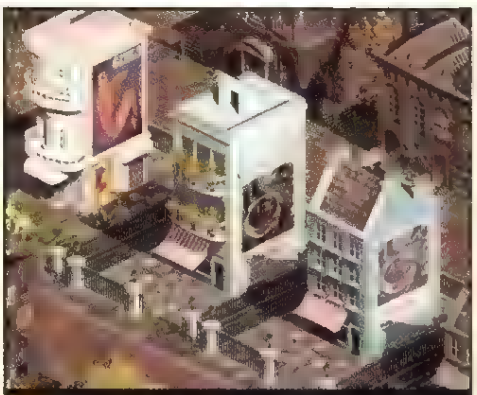
Each building is populated by tenants, who supply you with workers, money, or new tenants. "You can't have all three, so you click on one of three icons," says Cale. "Then you can upgrade tenants into workers or 'fixers,' so in the early levels, you need three workers to make a gangster. The more you breed, the more workers you get, the faster you can build things, and the more gangsters you can put in your army."

And the gangsters are the main back-bone of any urban task force. "You set out barrels around your prime property, and if anyone tries to attack you, the gangsters will automatically attack them," says Cale. "You can also use gangsters to take out certain people, but they only start off with a knife. But if you do certain hits, you get so many points, then you can upgrade to a handgun, a shotgun, then a machine gun — which is the most powerful weapon."

In *Street Wars*, the three main resources are bricks, steel, and cement. Keep a steady stream of workers breeding and heading into this factory, and all will be well.

You'll be able to build everything from bordellos to hospitals, but you'll need to keep an eye open for the fuzz — as your buildings gain more notoriety, they'll become more susceptible to raids from the cops. The Men in Blue are going to attack your stock houses, and give some of your minions trouble — unless you manage to slip them enough bribe money under the table.

Another important element is that of *undesirables*, or characters who can cripple your opponents' productivity. "You can build a brothel, then use a prostitute to do a striptease in the street, which distracts the opposition," says Cale. They're forced to dance along with her to music, while *you* go blow up a house or do a hit on someone. There are psychos who go out with chainsaws and massacre people, there are people who plant petrol bombs, there are hoods from the pool hall, and there's a local vicar who goes out and extorts money from rival tenants."



Take it from us: Two soup kitchens and a classy strip-joint make any bleak neighborhood more visually appealing for its inhabitants.

Bomb-sniffing dogs always come in handy when there's a price on your head. We think this one's stating the obvious, though.

Though the subject matter is particularly dark, the game's visuals maintain an air of humor throughout the whole experience. "We don't want to promote violence, so we had to do the art in a very slapstick way," says Cale. "We had to use the adult cartoon style. If it's a sim about knocking people off, it's going to get banned in Germany, which is the second largest PC market in the world."

Cale is positive that *Street Wars* will get a warm reception from a gaming public ready for something new and unique. "There's no one genre that you can slot this into," says Cale. "Think of it as *SimCity* meets *Monopoly* and *Risk*. It's not another war game that's ripping off *Command and Conquer* — we're trying to do something that's far, far better than that. I think we're offering the market something new, exciting, and bloody good."

PCG

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The melted remains I sent in my last letter were not those of your son. Our condolences. Your son, Joe, is attached above in this little baggie.

Please return the previously sent melted Private at your earliest convenience.

Deepest regrets,

Sarge

Sarge

P.S. Although there will never be another Joe, you'll be glad to know we're already molding others in his likeness.

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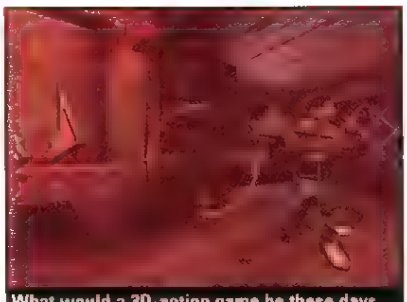
As Unreal as it Gets

Three new additions to the Unreal *world are in progress*

Unreal's publisher GT Interactive has announced that three new *Unreal* titles are in development: *Unreal Tournament, Unreal Level Pack*, and *Unreal II*. While the game's original creator Epic MegaGames goes to work on *Unreal Tournament*, the level pack and the sequel will be developed by Legend Entertainment (the team that's also developing the *Unreal*-based Robert Jordan license *Wheel of Time*). The level pack will feature 10 additional levels, new weapons and enemies, and is scheduled for a spring release. *Unreal II* is much further down the road, but Legend promises a cutting edge game that will combine the latest technology with new innovations in game design. According to Michael Verdu, Chairman of Legend, "*Unreal* fans won't be disappointed by the results; this game is going to *rock*!"

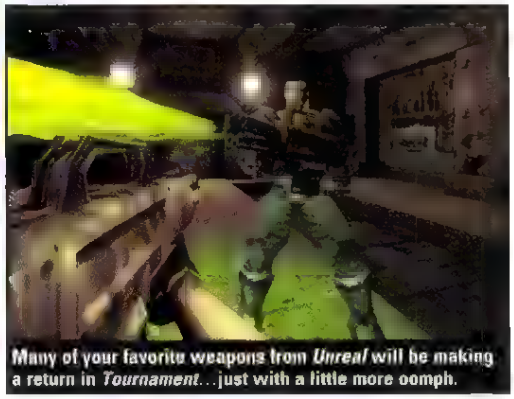
Perhaps the most interesting of the three, though, is Epic's *Unreal Tournament*, due this Spring. The original *Unreal* was dinged for sloppy network code and poor multi-play, and the goal of *Tournament* is to set that straight — just like id's forthcoming *Quake III: Arena*, it's aimed squarely at multiplayer gamers. Players will be able to compete in deathmatch and Capture the Flag games either online or in the company of *Unreal*'s artificially intelligent bots. The networking code is being streamlined to make online play smoother, and there'll be an all-new interface designed to make finding and connecting to games less of a chore. There'll also be a "turbo mode" aimed at challenging expert players.



What would a 3D-action game be these days without a sniper-style weapon?

Some of the weapons from *Unreal* will be returning for *Tournament*, but you can expect them to be quite a bit beefier this time around. And prepare yourself for an all-new weapon called The Redeemer, which fires projectiles that can be steered toward their target with the aid of a built-in camera. Finally, Epic is hoping to make the level-editing tools easier to play with in an attempt to encourage the currently stagnant *Unreal* online community to start coming up with home-brewed levels and mods.

Gameplay variants such as Capture the Flag will play a big part in the team-based action of *Unreal Tournament*. Teams can be comprised of other human players, bots, or a combination of both.



Many of your favorite weapons from *Unreal* will be making a return in *Tournament*...just with a little more oomph.

HOMEWORLD

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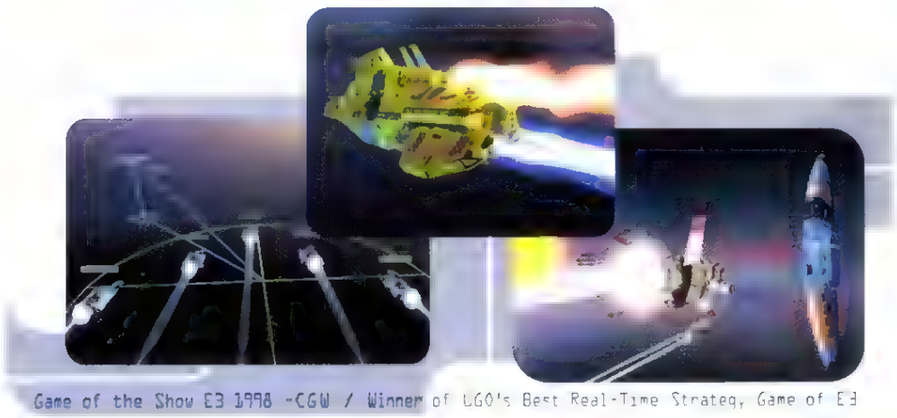

Game of the Show E3 1998 -CGW / Winner of LGO's Best Real-Time Strateg, Game of E3

Developer Solid

takes you off the traditional 2D playing field and puts you into a 3D world, alive with realistic effects. Intelligent ships work in

enemy, strategically using their environment, from asteroid belts to galactic nebula. It's not about showing off what our

innovative 3D engine can do. It's about doing something different. It's about doing something fun.

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Sim-thing Different

A couple of curiosities from Maxis

Maxis' flagship title *SimCity 3000* is due to hit stores any day now, but fans of the series have more than just that to look forward to — Maxis has announced two more Sim titles set to debut sometime in 1999.

First up is *The Sims*, a strategy game that Maxis is describing as a "people simulator." Using the same open-ended, no-way-to-win-or-lose play style as other Sim titles, *The Sims* puts the player in charge of a family of simulated people as they interact within their neighborhood. The quality of your charges' lives is in your hands; you can decide to be a benevolent overseer helping to bring happiness, or an emotionless tyrant, neglecting the needs of the people who count on you.

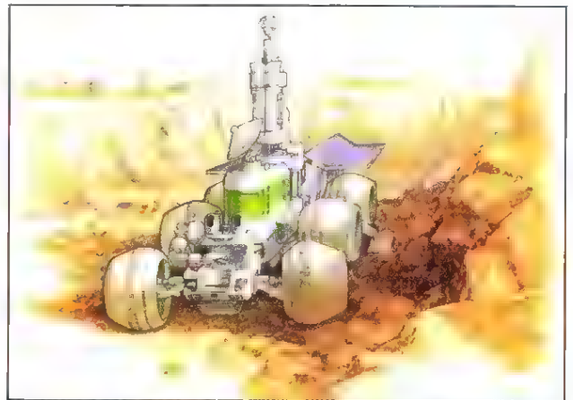
You'll be able to choose from a selection of pre-created Sims, or customize your own using a point system in areas such as personality, skills, and career. The points will be limited, so be ready to make some hard choices — if you want your Sim to be a very happy person, you may have to balance that off by making him a lazy slob.

Your family will need a place to live, of course, and *The Sims* will let you choose from a set of house plans or design a custom home. You'll be able to decide everything from plumbing and lighting plans to the type of furniture used to decorate your home.

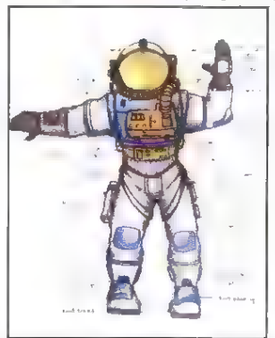
Life isn't all material possessions, though. In order for your Sims to truly be happy, you'll need to assist them in finding a good job, making friends, and finding that "special sim one" for your single Sims to flirt and pursue a relationship with.

Next up is *SimMars*. This real-time strategy game will take place on a 3D representation of the red planet. Earth has finally decided to settle Mars, and the player will be at the helm of this first colonization mission, with the goals of exploring the landscape for valuable resources and establishing a network of colonies.

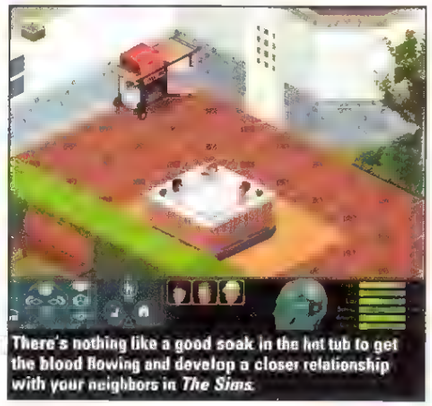
Scientific research will play a major role in your survival, and Maxis claims that *SimMars* will be grounded quite firmly in reality. Since it's set in the near future, the game will feature a mix of real world science and NASA inspired scientific theory. Terraforming and genetic research will prove to be vitally important as you strive to create a self-sufficient community.



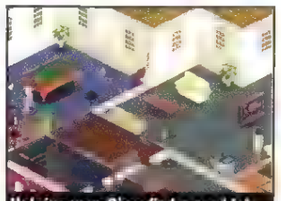
Exploring the Martian landscape for resources will be essential if you hope to keep your colonists alive in *Sim Mars*.



You're going to rely heavily on this spacesuit until you figure out a way to make the red planet hospitable for human existence.



There's nothing like a good soak in the hot tub to get the blood flowing and develop a closer relationship with your neighbors in *The Sims*.



Helping your Sims find a good job will allow you to design a custom house, complete with plenty of creature comforts.

Be careful when assigning points to your Sims...a combination of being a klutz and a bad cook can be disastrous!

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You'll Be On Your Knees
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```
if (range < gunstatic->bulletrange*bonus)
if (gunCanShoot(ship, gun))
switch (gunstatic->guntype)
case GUN_MissileLauncher:
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading,ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
vecDotProduct(*trajectory,shipheading);
shotguns = TRUE;
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
missileShoot(ship,gun,target);
case GUN_MineLauncher:
if (gunHasMissiles(gun))
matGetVectFromMatrixCol3(shipheading,ship->rotinfo.coordsys);
vecDotProduct(*trajectory,shipheading);
if (dotprod >= triggerHappy)
missileShoot(ship,gun,target);
```

ALL GAME

Even Better the Second Time Around

Activision has a couple of sizzling sequels on the way in the new year

Pandemic Studios, the internal development group recently funded by Activision, is preparing a couple of follow-ups to two excellent originals — *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign*. Both games will take full advantage of the latest technology to present some stunning visuals, but Pandemic has also been listening carefully to its fans and is making a load of refinements to the gameplay in each.

Battlezone 2 (working title) is scheduled for a late summer release, and will carry on the fine tradition set by the original, even carrying over the cold-war story line with a new conspiracy for players to uncover. The sequel will be more accessible for newcomers, with a much more forgiving learning curve. Early missions will ease the player into the game, concentrating on the action portion, and as you progress, the strategic elements will be slowly incorporated.

The interface, one of the standout features of the original, will be tweaked to make it even more intuitive. The artificial intelligence of your wingmen and the pathfinding and collision-avoidance capabilities of the vehicles should also be improved. Multiplayer features will be addressed, with Pandemic planning on including many more options for group play than were featured in the first game. Naturally, there will be a variety of new worlds to explore, and cool new vehicles to control and fight against. From what we've seen so far, *Battlezone 2* should please both veterans and newcomers alike.

There will be new planets to explore in *Battlezone 2*, and the graphics promise to be more gorgeous than ever.

Set to take the real-time strategy genre by storm this fall is *Dark Reign II*. The original was a fairly straightforward example of the genre, but added many features that improved on what had come before; *Dark Reign II* plans to innovate still further.

This innovation will come in the form of the incredibly beautiful 3D engine that has been designed for the game. Other real-time strategy games have used 3D as a basis for their worlds, but none has lived up to the potential that we've seen in *DRII*. The terrain is very realistic, not just in its appearance, but in how it affects the strategy. True line-of-sight rules and real-world physics have to be considered in every move you make, and those who subscribe to the school of thought that "whoever builds the most units wins" will be in for a rude awakening.

This doesn't mean that there will be a shortage of units slugging it out, though. Pandemic has teamed up with Intel for access to a technology that the giant chipmaker has developed called Multi Resolution Mesh, or MRM. MRM is similar to the "Messiah" technology developed by Shiny Entertainment, in that it scales the number of polygons it uses to draw a scene depending on your system's power. MRM also prioritizes polygons, meaning that it assigns a high value to the polygons that

Continued on page 56: See Second Time

***Battlezone 2* will have a more gradual learning curve than the original, with earlier missions leaning more toward action over strategy.**

This series of screens is a good example of *Dark Reign II's* Multi Resolution Mesh technology, created in conjunction with Intel, in action. As the camera view closes in on the scene, more polygons are used to show all of the units in exquisite detail.

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Let's Hit Hitler Where He Lives

Interactive Magic enters the first-person genre with Mortyr

How could a really bad Austrian artist cause so much trouble?

If you've ever wondered what it would be like to play *Wolfenstein 3D* with all the latest advances in gameplay and graphics, then you may be in for a treat. *Mortyr* is the name of an upcoming game from developer Mirage and publisher Interactive Magic, and looks like it may bring out the Nazi-stomper in all of us when it's released in early April.

The story takes place in an alternate universe in which the Nazis won World War Two. It's the year 2093, and the planet is on the brink of destruction from severe weather. You are Sebastian Mortyr, a former soldier in the German army. Your father, a high-ranking Nazi officer, has long suspected that the Nazis are the cause of this planetary devastation. With the help of a scientist that has invented a time travel machine, your father arranges to send you back to 1944 to help thwart the Nazi war effort and right the wrongs that are occurring in your own time.

Mortyr will feature a proprietary 3D engine complete with all the latest graphical effects — real-time ambient lighting, reflective surfaces, and transparencies for creating fog and mist. You'll have an arsenal of 12 weapons to help you through the 20 huge single-player levels, while special gear, including night-vision goggles, jet-packs, and silencers will also become available along the way. Interactive Magic is promising that *Mortyr's* artificially intelligent enemies will behave very realistically, trying to flee when wounded, calling in reinforcements, and using objects for cover.

Since this *is* a first-person shooter, multi-play features are almost considered mandatory. *Mortyr* should hold up well here, with standard deathmatch and capture the flag modes, but also touting an objective-based cooperative mode against computer or human opponents.

The proprietary graphics engine of *Mortyr* looks like it will hold up well in today's *Unreal*-dominated world.

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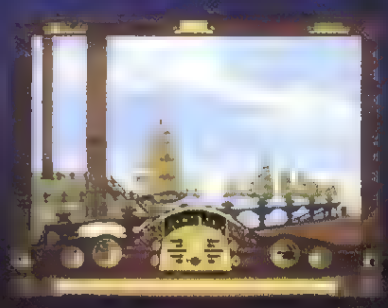
The order is given. Prepare for battle!

In the Exploded Edition of Man of War comes the all new high seas combat of Man of War II. Take command as a Fleet Admiral, Division Commander or Ship's Captain and face the fury of a Broadside, the terror of a boarding action and the thrill of a glorious victory in a dramatic real-time first person perspective.



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Hate Coupled with Disgust

The definition of a new RPG from Monolith

Monolith Productions is at it again. Last month we told you about Monolith's acquisition of the North American publishing rights of *Septerra Core* from Germany-based TopWare This month, the newly acquired game is called *Odium* (literally meaning 'hate coupled with disgust'), and it comes from Polish developer Metropolis.

Odium is a turn-based RPG in which the player takes on the role of Cole Sullivan, an investigator for NATO, who has tracked down a covert Russian training facility modeled as an exact replica of a typical U.S. city. Reports have been coming in of some disturbing occurrences at the facility, and it's up to you to uncover what's going on. The game has a very dark theme, with a plot steeped heavily in hidden conspiracies based on supposed real-world happenings

Aside from Sullivan, you'll be able to control up to three other party members, each with unique attributes that will help you with your mission. The graphics are looking very sweet, using hand-painted backgrounds and 3D character models boasting as many as 2,000 polygons. A skeletal animation system should help the characters to move very realistically, and the environment will come alive with rain, fire, and lightning Look out for *Odium* this Spring.

Each of the character models in *Odium* will be made up of as many as 2,000 polygons.

Back on Track

Ion Storm fills the holes on Daikatana

Last month's mass defections from Ion Storm's *Daikatana* project left many wondering if the game will *ever* appear. Well, there's at least one person that has no shortage of confidence in the oft-delayed first-person shooter's imminent arrival — John Romero himself

Six new members have been added to the development team on *Daikatana*, and Romero is quite pleased with the progress they are making. "The new *Daikatana* mappers are up and blazing through to finish out all of the maps," he says. "The mapping team is now at six people, and they're all working supernard to complete *Daikatana* as soon as possible. They're doing a great job so far."

The new faces are a combination of new hires and current Ion Storm employees that have been reassigned to the project, and include

CHRIS KLIE — Lead Level Designer Credits include lead level designer of *Outlaws*, contributing level designer on *Mysteries of the Sith* and *Rogue Squadron 3D* while at LucasArts

[illegible] CK — Level [illegible] Gamer turned level designer when he caught Romero's interest with one of his map designs

MIKE MONTAGUE — Programmer Working on sound and enemy AI, formerly with 7th Level

RICH CARLSON — Level Designer Moved over from *Anachronox* team

LIKKA KERANEN — Designer Moved over from *Anachronox* team

STEVIE "KILLCREEK" CASE — Tester Was a Quality Assurance tester at Ion Storm; best known for kicking Romero's butt in deathmatch

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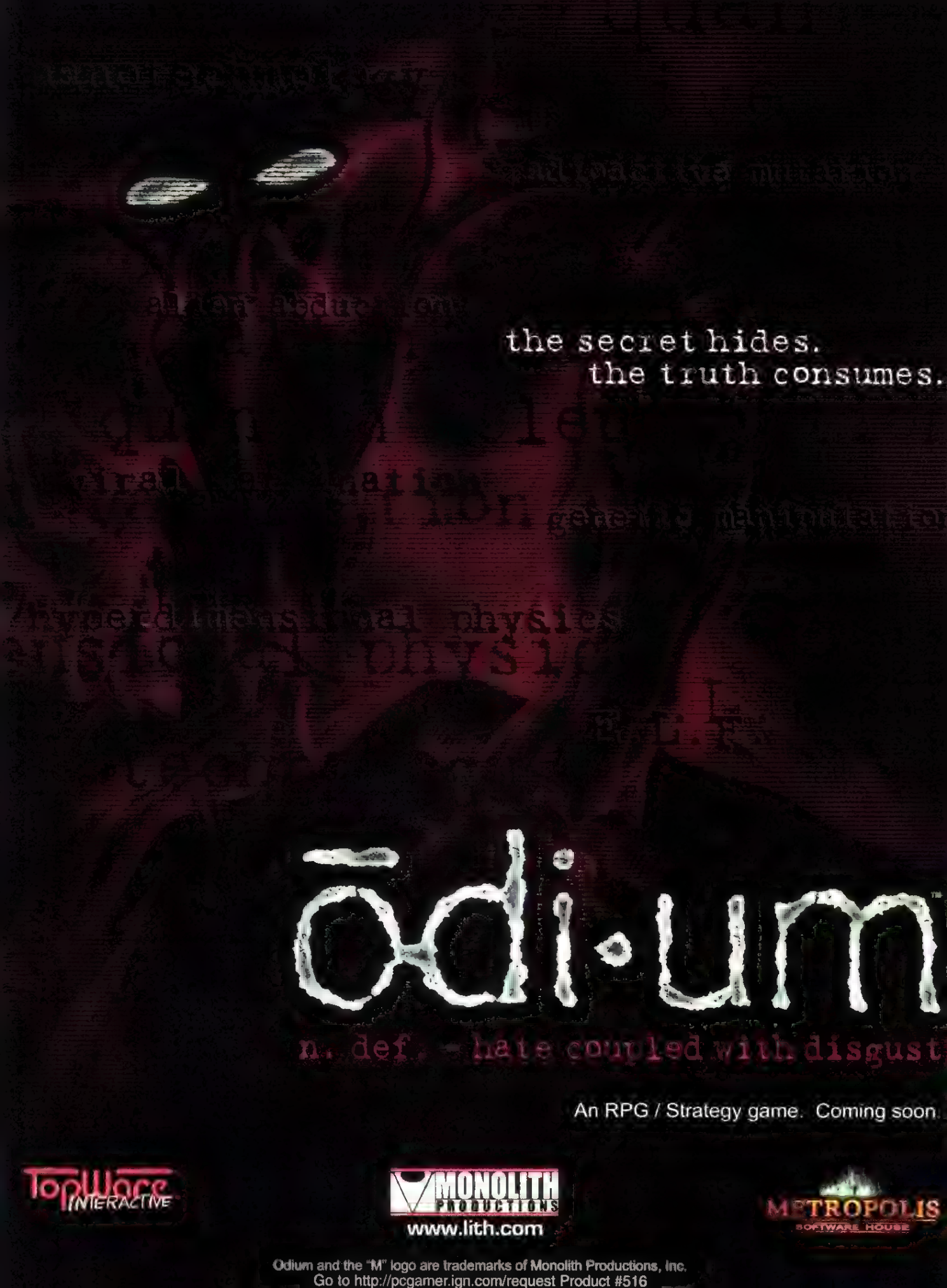

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If I Could Be Like Jeff

ASC Games has a new racer co-designed by NASCAR hero Jeff Gordon

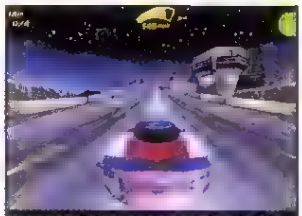
The future of NASCAR is set to be one hell of a ride, if *Jeff Gordon XS Racing* from ASC Games is anything to go by. This purely arcade racing game won't just bear the famous name, it's being co-designed and co-produced by Gordon, one of the most successful drivers to ever don the fire-retardants.

Apparently Gordon, a video game buff since the tender age of five, was looking to add his input and create the racing game he always wanted to play. And so ASC hooked him up with developer RealSports, and the team set out to make one of the most intense, high-speed racers available — and from what we've seen, they may just succeed.

Set in the future, *XS Racing* will feature twelve-car competition at speeds exceeding 300mph over 10 tracks loaded with jumps, steeply banked corners, and multiple paths. Each driver will have a unique personality, and the ultimate goal is to face off against Mr. G in a little one-on-one action.

Pretty graphics, visceral sounds, blazing speed, and multiplayer madness (via LAN, Internet, or split-screen mode) should make *Jeff Gordon XS Racing* a title to watch for when it hits store shelves in March.

The sleek, futuristic vehicles in *Jeff Gordon XS Racing* will have wings to smooth out the landing.



Insanely high-speed racing is the mantra of ASC Games' new racer.

The Winds of Change

Cyclone Studios is no more, but a new startup rises from the rubble

In the past couple of years, Cyclone Studios has made something of a name for itself within the PC gaming community with titles like *Uprising*, *Uprising 2* and *Requiem: Avenging Angel*. But now, parent company 3DO has decided to shut down the development group. Most of the team members that comprised Cyclone are still around, but they'll now be toiling under the 3DO label itself.

But this "absorption" didn't sit well at all with some of the Cyclone alum, who have left 3DO to form a new development studio, Black Mace Entertainment. Heading up this new venture is John Eberhardt, an industry veteran who worked on SSI's Panzer General series before joining Cyclone. "We are a committed group with the talent and lineage behind us, and the best designs and engine plans in front of us," Eberhardt says. "Cyclone Studios was the technical edge that 3DO had in its stable. Though consolidating the studios may have been the best thing for the bottom line, there will be a creative passion that is lost in the process."

Stay tuned for details of Black Mace's first projects, as well as news of the team's publishing deal, which should be announced shortly. In the meantime, check out the company's website at *www.blackmace.com* to see how things are progressing at the new group.

BLACK MACE ENTERTAINMENT

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News Briefs

Myth II Snafu

Bungie Software has sent word that there was a problem in the initial shipping version of *Myth II: Soulblighter*. It seems that if the game was installed in any directory other than the default one, there would be major problems when the Uninstall program was used. Bungie has decided to recall the product, but it's an outside possibility that copies of the faulty code may still wind up on store shelves. So, just to be safe, if you purchase the game, make sure it is clearly labeled "version 1.1"

Take Two Takes Off

Here's a story about a software company that actually *made* money last year. Take Two Interactive reported a 104 percent increase in net sales, and a net income of more than $6 million for the year ending October 31, 1998, compared to a net loss of $3.6 million for the previous year. The huge turn-around was mostly realized from Take Two's European business, where the company distributes such best-sellers as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Railroad Tycoon II*, and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*.

Another Developer Signing from GT

Reflections Interactive, developer of the very cool looking *Driver* (see our February issue for the Scoop), has signed up with GT Interactive. The deal was consummated for 2.28 million shares of GT common stock, with additional payments possible, dependant upon future results. Reflections was formed back in 1984 in Newcastle, England, and is best known for its Destruction Derby titles for both PC and PlayStation, as well as *Shadow of the Beast*, a best-seller on the Amiga

Mattel Wants *Myst*

Mattel, the giant toy maker that has found considerable success in the PC world with its Barbie programs, is intent on buying The Learning Company. As we reported back in our December issue, The Learning Company had purchased Broderbund, whose *Myst* and *Riven* games have been perennial huge sellers. Now Mattel is making a $3.8 billion dollar bid for the massive software company, but it has run into a snag. It seems that The Learning Company's shareholders are not thrilled with the deal and have filed a suit to block the purchase, stating that the board of directors have "breached its fiduciary duty" in approving the buy out. More news as we get it.

LithTech Does 3D Sound

Monolith Productions has announced that it will be incorporating RAD Game Tools' Miles Sound System into its LithTech engine. The system includes 3D sound support for all of the major API's such as DirectSound3D, Creative Labs' EAX, Intel's RSX, and Aureal's A3D. This added feature should help make the LithTech engine more attractive to developers looking to license a 3D engine

Return to *Shogo*

A new expansion pack for Monolith's *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* is scheduled for an April release. The add-on will be titled *Shogo: Legacy of the Fallen*, and will be developed by Aztech New Media. Aztech is promising six new characters, eight new weapons and monsters, and eight new Mobile Combat Armor units

The U.S. market can now be assured the *Driver* will be coming to our shores, thanks to GT Interactive picking up the publishing rights.

The PC Gamer Playlist

What's hot at the magazine's offices this month.

Hammy, our beady-eyed little mascot, won our "cutest staff member" award paws down.

1.	[illegible]	Everybody
2.	[illegible]	Dan
3.	[illegible]	Rob, Greg
4.	[illegible]	Wolf, Billy
5.	[illegible]	Gary, Lisa
6.	[illegible]	MLuton, Billy
7.	[illegible]	Rob, Jay
8.	[illegible]	Dan, Dean
9.	[illegible]	Everybody
10.	[illegible]	Hammy

Second Time

Continued from page 50

give a model its shape, and a lower value to the polygons that provide more detail. As you get closer to a model, more of the lower priority polygons will be added, assuming your CPU and 3D accelerator can handle the additional load. To take full advantage of MRM, all of the models in *Dark Reign II* are being created in very high detail, so as you step up in processing power, the game will continue to visually improve.

This new technology should go a long way toward remedying one of the major complaints that fans of the original *Dark Reign* had — it just didn't look very good. Other gripes were aimed at the overall difficulty of the game, and the lack of any reward for completing a mission. Pandemic guarantees that things will be different this time around

Battlezone was one of the most pleasant surprises of last year, and garnered many an award from the gaming press (heck, we loved it so much it was one of our runners-up for Game of the Year!), while *Dark Reign* managed to win over a very jaded group of gamers that was being bombarded by one boring and hackneyed real-time strategy game after another. The fact that both of these sequels look like huge improvements over their predecessors bodes extremely well for fans of action and strategy in '99.

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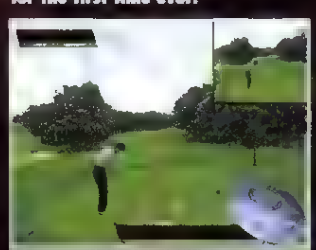

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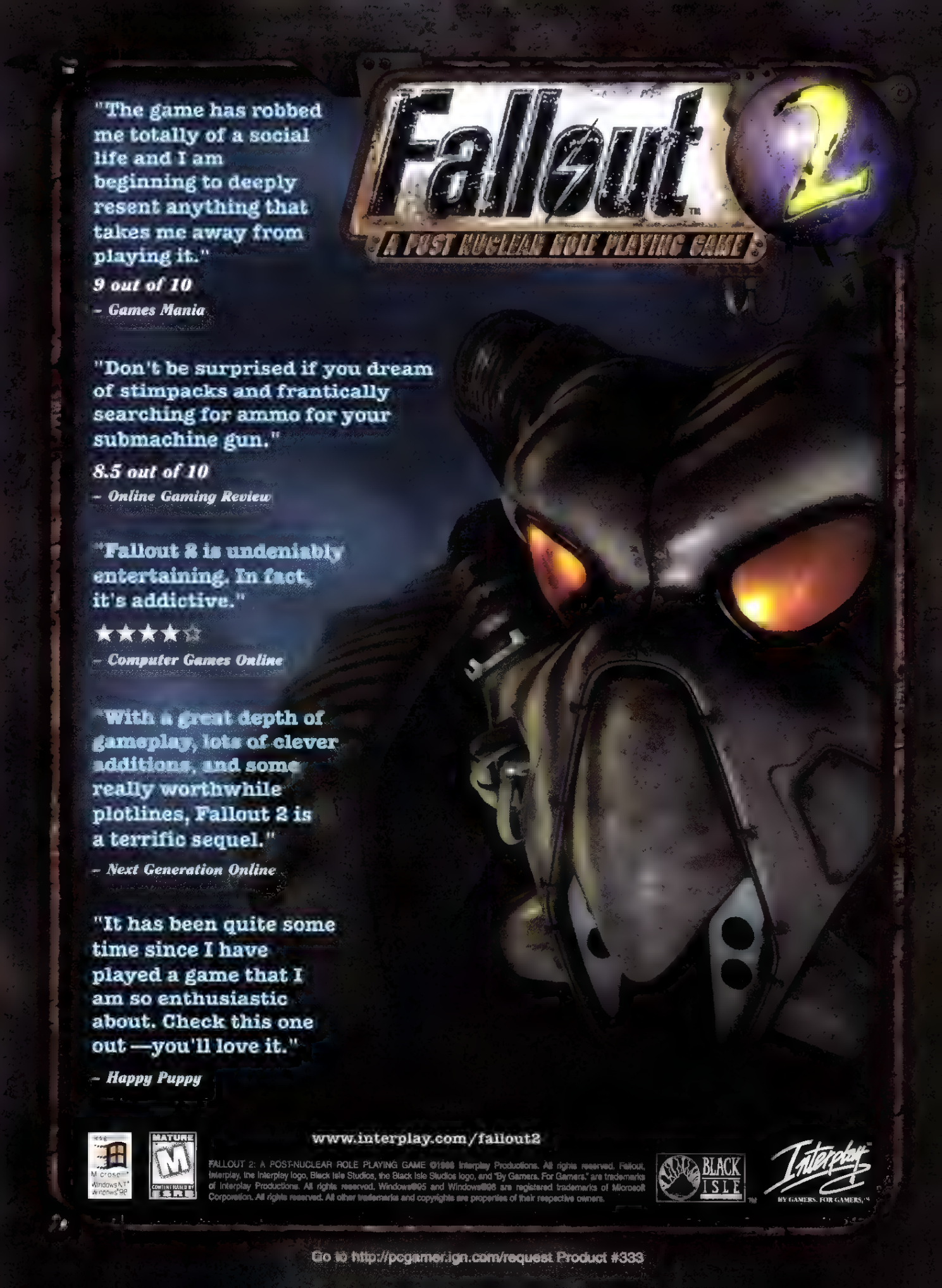
"The game has robbed me totally of a social life and I am beginning to deeply resent anything that takes me away from playing it."
9 out of 10
– Games Mania
"Don't be surprised if you dream of stimpacks and frantically searching for ammo for your submachine gun."
8.5 out of 10
– Online Gaming Review
"Fallout 2 is undeniably entertaining. In fact, it's addictive."
★★★★☆
– Computer Games Online
"With a great depth of gameplay, lots of clever additions, and some really worthwhile plotlines, Fallout 2 is a terrific sequel."
– Next Generation Online
"It has been quite some time since I have played a game that I am so enthusiastic about. Check this one out —you'll love it."
– Happy Puppy
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THE GAME OF THE YEAR

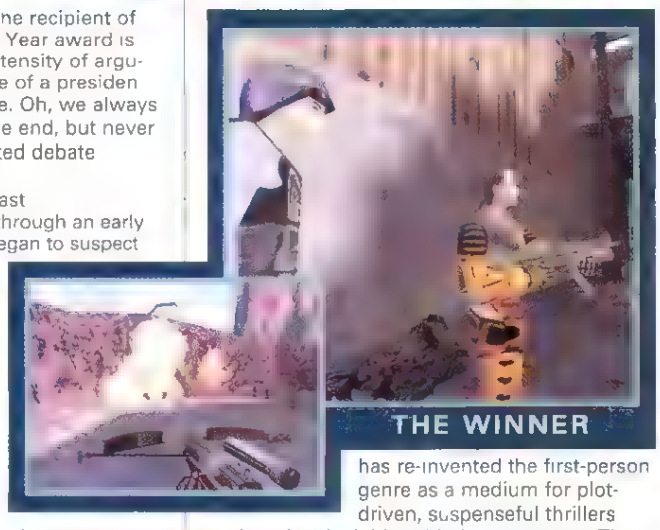
Half-Life

SIERRA

The process of deciding the recipient of our annual Game of the Year award is usually defined by an intensity of argument rarely seen outside of a presidential impeachment debate. Oh, we always decide on the right game in the end, but never without a protracted and spirited debate amongst the editorial team.

Well, until this year, at least

Even as we were playing through an early demo of Valve's *Half Life*, we began to suspect that we were looking at a serious Game of the Year contender. And by the time we (that is to say, virtually every member of the *PC Gamer* team) had made it to the enigmatic end sequence of the full game, there was no doubt; this year, there would be no jostling for Game of the Year as is the norm — this year, it was *Half-Life* all the way



THE WINNER

But why? As some readers have remonstrated, it's just a first-person shooter, right? Well, sure — in the same way that *Casablanca* is just a movie about a guy who runs a bar, and *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts' Club Band* is just a collection of pop songs. It's not easy for a game to rise above the perceived limitations of its genre — particularly in one that has become so oppressively stereotyped as first person shooters — but *Half Life* did it, and so convincingly that it has redefined perceptions of what a first-person shooter can, and should, be.

The gaming press has filled thousands of column inches with head-over-heels adulation of *Half-Life* in recent months — and rightly so — but it boils down to this: never has a game been so immersive, so *real*. Unlike other 3D action games that slaughter the suspension of disbelief with lengthy load times and inappropriate cut-scenes, *Half-Life* never takes the player out of the game world. Everything is seamless, and so the illusion of a real, persistent world is perfect. It's a combination of many other "little" things, too — enemy AI that's actually *intelligent*, weapons that feel meaty and responsive, puzzles that make sense, aliens that are genuinely scary rather than absurd and, of course, the myriad scripted scenes that delight and terrify at every turn. All come together in a game that has re-invented the first-person genre as a medium for plot-driven, suspenseful thrillers and not just insipid multi-player carnage. There will always be those who turn their noses up at any game in this genre, but cast that kind of snobbishness aside, and there's a strong argument that *Half-Life* is, pound for pound, one of the most expertly crafted PC games ever — and a more than worthy recipient of *PC Gamer*'s Game of the Year.

The fact that *Half Life* ran away with this year's award does not reflect poorly on the other contenders, however — on the contrary, it's to the game's credit that it won in the face of such strong opposition. If *Half-Life* had slipped into next year, for example, *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* from Red Storm would almost certainly have taken the award for its brilliantly original combination of knife edge action and realistic tactics. Or maybe it would have been Activision's *Battlezone*, a who-would-have-thought-it-possible melding of first-person action and real-time strategy that also boasted some of the year's best presentation and interface design. Both games make splendid and deserved runners-up

All of the three games named this year have done something to break the mold and challenge conventional perceptions about their respective genres — yet another indication of the PC gaming scene's constant innovation and an exciting portent of what's to come in 1999

THE BEST ACTION GAME

RED STORM

Rainbow Six

There's only one rule in determining the winners of the *PC Gamer* Awards: the title that wins Game of the Year cannot compete in any other category. The idea is to prevent one game from dominating and to make sure that others get the chance to shine in their respective categories. But even without that rule, this year it would have been difficult to give Best Action Game to anything but *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*.

While *Half Life* showed how far single player action games have progressed, *Rainbow Six* arguably did even more, changing the very way in which we play them. Despite its story depth, immersive environments, and incredible gameplay, *Half-Life* still clung to the traditions of the genre: flip switches, solve puzzles, and side strafe opponents. *Rainbow Six*, on the other hand, took those conventions and tossed them out the window. Make no mistake — the days of blindly charging into a room are *over*.

With its realistic philosophy of "one shot, one kill," *Rainbow Six* brings raw emotion into a genre that normally concerns itself solely with blind action. From the planning stages of each level right through to the actual mission execution, *Rainbow Six* grabs you by the throat and refuses to let go. The tension you feel while playing is a tangible emotion — as is the fear. There's nothing that can compare to having your entire team cut down around you while you realize that you are suddenly alone — and surrounded by terrorists.

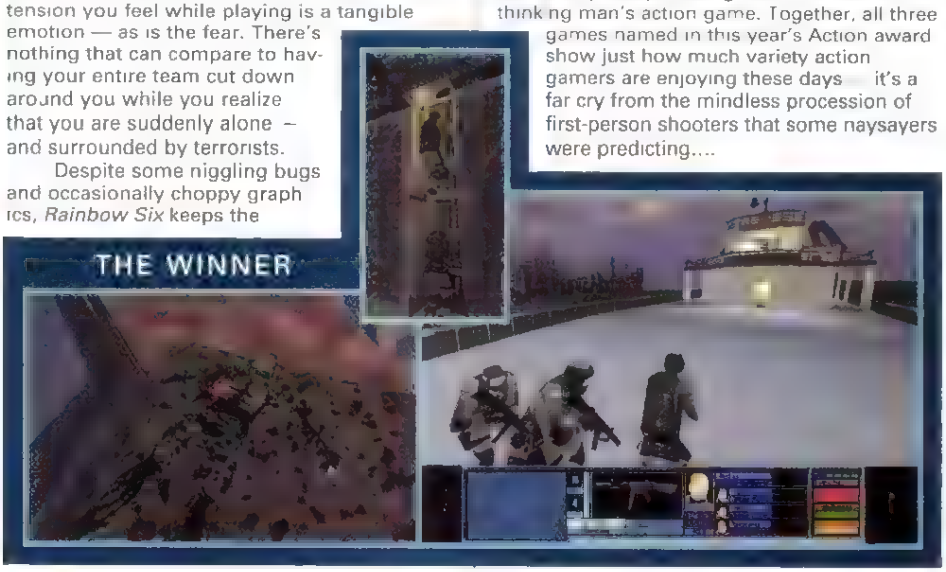
Despite some niggling bugs and occasionally choppy graphics, *Rainbow Six* keeps the player on the line through a succession of increasingly tense scenarios, where instant death is never more than a careless footstep away. Such is the effect that this intense style of play has on many gamers that going back to a traditional shooter like *Quake II* or *Unreal* after becoming proficient at *Rainbow Six* can be a jarring, and strangely unsubstantial, experience.

Rainbow Six is also one of those rare action games that shines just as brightly in multi player mode as it does in single-player. Both cooperative and adversarial modes deliver the goods with innovative rulesets and scenarios, and the result is an immensely addictive multiplayer experience — no title since *Quake II* has so enthralled the staff of *PC Gamer*. Action Game of the Year? No doubt about it.

Grabbing the two runners-up spots this year are Interplay's *Descent: Freespace* and Activision's *Battlezone*. Boasting huge depth and scale combined with eye-popping visuals, *Freespace* came from nowhere to wrest the 3D space combat crown from the Wing Commander series with style. Meanwhile, Activision surprised everyone this year by seamlessly blending action and real time strategy, and the result was both pulse pounding and smart — the thinking man's action game. Together, all three games named in this year's Action award show just how much variety action gamers are enjoying these days — it's a far cry from the mindless procession of first-person shooters that some naysayers were predicting....

THE RUNNERS UP

THE WINNER



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THE BEST ADVENTURE GAME

Grim Fandango

LUCASARTS

It's sad to note that one of the most impoverished genres of 1998 is one of the few that gave birth to PC gaming — the good, old-fashioned adventure. This style of gaming dates back to the time when computers filled entire rooms, and has had a long and illustrious history on the PC. Although the pickings were slim in terms of the overall number of titles to choose from (and the future doesn't look much brighter with the cancellation of *WarCraft Adventures* and the "on hiatus" *Star Trek: Secret of Vulcan Fury*), that didn't prevent a few truly outstanding games from shining like diamonds in the rough last year.

And of course it was LucasArts, producer of some of history's finest adventure games and one of the few developers to still champion the genre, which gave us this year's winner — *Grim Fandango*. Not content to fall into the same old trappings, LucasArts stretched its story-telling muscles and picked a most interesting backdrop to base the game on — the Mexican Day of the Dead Festival. With a cast full of the liveliest dead people you'll ever see, *Grim Fandango* weaves a story through the Land of the Dead that is gripping in every way.

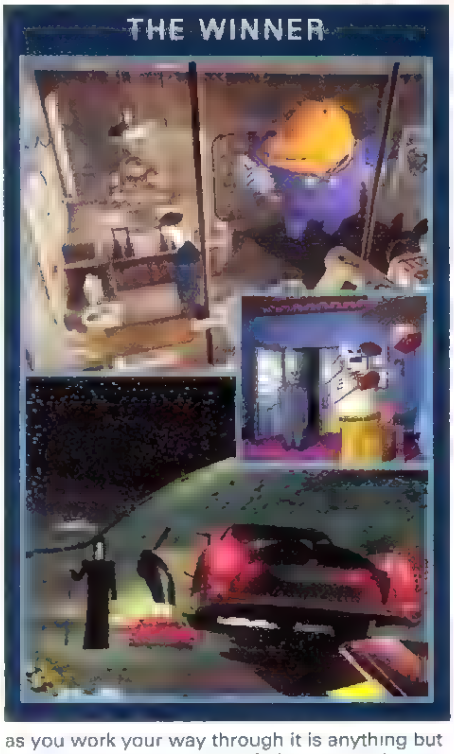
Taking on the role of Manny Calavera, travel agent for the Department of Death, the player is treated to an adventure game unlike any ever seen. The settings are a gorgeous amalgamation of Southwestern and Aztec themes, delivered in a film noir style that brings the world vibrantly to life. The intelligent and witty dialogue is expertly delivered by a team of well-cast voice actors, the background music sets the mood perfectly, and the plot is interesting and cohesive.

The puzzles are integrated very nicely into the story line, and LucasArts even found time to re-invent the way we look and play at graphic adventures, thanks to *Grim*'s 3D technology and mouse-less interface that makes manipulating objects and interacting with the environments a breeze. It all adds up to a fantastic game and a worthy winner of this year's award.

Our first runner-up is *Sanitarium* from ASC Games. Though it's a very traditional adventure game in its execution, the story you'll uncover as you work your way through it is anything but ordinary. Playing the part of Max, you wake up with a bad case of amnesia in an asylum filled with some pretty disturbed inhabitants. The goal is to learn more about your past and how you arrived in your current predicament, but all is not as it appears — and that's all we're going to say so as not to ruin the surprises in store for you. What you need to know is that *Sanitarium* is full of beautiful graphics, interesting characters, and well-designed puzzles, and is a must-play for any true adventurer.

Our other runner-up, *Redguard* from Bethesda, is a swashbuckling adventure set in the *Daggerfall* universe. Much tighter in design and real estate than Bethesda's sprawling roleplaying games, *Redguard* boasts lovely scenery, a host of well-developed characters to interact with, and a deep and involving story. While it has a lot of action-style gameplay that may turn off the stodgier adventure fans, *Redguard* delivers the genre's staples of exploration and puzzle solving in a fresh and entertaining way.

THE WINNER

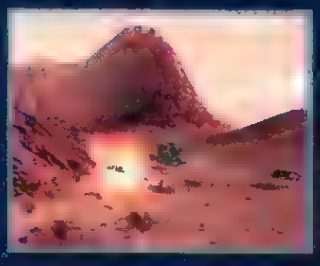


THE RUNNERS-UP

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN INNOVATION...

Battlezone

Okay, we know Activision's *Battlezone* wasn't the first game to combine elements of first-person shooters and real-time strategy games. 3DO's *Uprising* did it, too, and it appeared on the shelves before *Battlezone*. But the two games were in development at the same time, so it's safe to say there still would've been a *Battlezone* even if *Uprising* never existed. And, not to put too fine a point on it, *Battlezone* turned out to be a much better take on this exciting new genre. It's emphatically a 3D shooter, with lots of frenetic, first-person combat — but it's also undeniably a real-time strategy game, complete with resource-gathering, base-building, and engaging multiplayer battles. It was easily the most original game we played in 1998, and while its sales were disappointing, we hope to see more games like it in 1999. *Battlezone II* is on the way, and there's talk of simplifying it in the hope of appealing to a wider audience — let's hope that doesn't also mean robbing it of the uniqueness that made *Battlezone* so special.



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN GRAPHICS...

Unreal

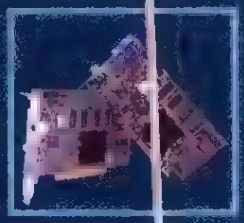
There may have been better games released last year, but when it came to pure graphical splendor, there was nothing to match Epic MegaGames' *Unreal*. While the *Quake II* engine is restricted to mainly small indoor areas, *Unreal* can handle large outdoor scenes just as easily as the tight confines of a spaceship. Unconvinced? Just play through the opening scene in which you emerge from your crashed spaceship to be greeted by a glorious tropical vista (complete with waterfall), and you'll instantly become a true believer. And kiss goodbye to pixelicious textures when you get close to an object — *Unreal* keeps the definition high under even the closest scrutiny.

It's also the first game to make use of volumetric fog, which adds just the right atmosphere for some of the creepier levels. Add realistic fire, water, and a host of other unique effects, and you have the most graphically beautiful game ever to grace a computer screen. The system requirements may be giddyingly high, but hey — there's never been a better reason to upgrade.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN HARDWARE...

NVIDIA Riva TNT

It's hard to believe how far 3D technology has progressed in 1998. This time last year, our hardware section included reviews of two brand-spankin' new 3D accelerators: Guillemot's Voodoo Graphics-powered Maxi Gamer 3D and Canopus' RIVA 128-powered Total 3D 128V. Today, these cards are barely powerful enough to run *Quake II* — let alone newer games like *Unreal* and *Half-Life*. Looking back, it seems fitting that 3Dfx and NVIDA had the only two 3D chipsets featured that month — after all, both companies proved to be the biggest players in the hardware arena this year. While both companies followed up their successful chipsets with newer, ever more powerful solutions, ultimately it was NVIDIA, with its phenomenal RIVA TNT technology, that stole the show in '98.



Sure, two Voodoo2s running in SLI mode (where the two cards share the workload) are fast — but they require two extra PCI slots, while the TNT is almost as fast, if not faster, while taking up only one slot. Top it off with the fact that the TNT can render images in true 32-bit color, multi-texture, and take full advantage of AGP 2X, and you have a 3D chip that stands alone as the best new hardware of 1998.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN ART DIRECTION...

Grim Fandango

A goal for every game, regardless of genre, should be to draw the player into its universe, letting them escape the pressures and concerns of daily life. In order to achieve this, a lot of disparate factors have to come together to form a cohesive whole. With *Grim Fandango*, LucasArts sculpted a perfectly believable world based upon a most implausible setting — the Mexican Land of the Dead.

Even if all of the puzzle elements were removed from the game, *Grim*'s world would still be worth spending time in, thanks to the brilliant settings and cinematic scenes. By incorporating the moody visual sensibility of film noir with an otherworldly setting, LucasArts gave us something we very rarely see in games these days — a genuinely original and surprising universe. *PC Gamer*'s Art Direction award is given in recognition of graphics that are not merely technically excellent, but which succeed in creating something bigger, something wonderful. It's difficult to imagine a better example of that this year than *Grim Fandango*.

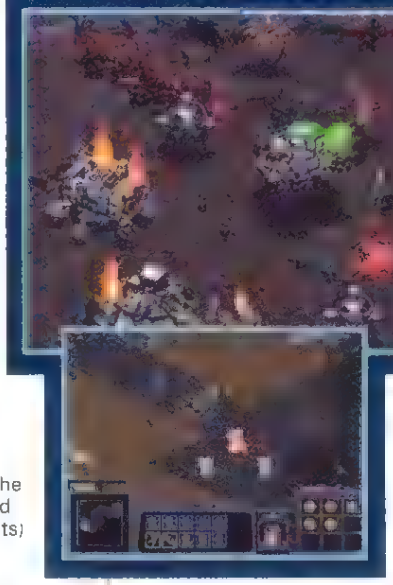
THE BEST REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

BLIZZARD StarCraft

1998 was not a banner year for this relatively new genre — indeed, history may well record it as the year of the real-time backlash. What began in 1997 continued into 1998 as virtually every publisher in the business cynically attempted to emulate the success of real-time blockbusters like *Command & Conquer*, *WarCraft II*, *Myth*, and *Total Annihilation*. The result was an unwanted surplus of poorly considered, uninspired, and downright shoddy RTS titles *Conquest Earth*, *Dominion*, *Waterworld*, *Armored Moon*, *M.A.X. 2*, *Warbreeds*... the list goes depressingly on. As the crap-pile grew ever larger, it was beginning to look as though a genre that seemed so promising just a couple of years ago was going to die prematurely, crushed under the weight of its own avarice.

And so it fell to Blizzard Entertainment, one of the two pioneers of the genre, to rescue it from its malaise and remind us (and the numerous copy-cats) just how much fun real-time strategy can be, when it's done right. And the game to do it was the much ballyhooed, much delayed, much anticipated *StarCraft*. Those who were expecting "*WarCraft* in Space" got a delightful surprise — though it looked, on the surface, to be a souped-up, space age re-enactment of the WarCraft games, Blizzard took the depth of play to the next level by building a design around not two but *three* very different races. In *WarCraft II*, the Orcs and Humans were much the same in terms of strength and organization — each unit had its opposite number, or near enough. In *StarCraft*, however, each of the three alien civilizations boasts unique styles of growth and construction, peculiar strengths and weaknesses — even philosophy. The distinction between the races is profound enough that the player's strategy is markedly different for each — a game between rival Terran forces, for example, plays out very differently to a Protoss versus Terran match-up, for example, and even less like a Zerg versus Protoss game. The single-player campaigns do a superb job of introducing the player to the eccentricities of each race (and boast some thrilling scenarios along the way), and the multi-player matches never fail to surprise. Blizzard's trademark presentation is flawless throughout, boasting hundreds of atmospheric touches. In the end, it's the sheer depth and variety of play that has kept this game fresh a year after its release, earned it the top spot in our Readers' All-Time Top 50 poll — and made it our Real-Time Strategy Game of the Year for 1998.

THE WINNER



The other two bright spots in an otherwise dull RTS year were a pair of long-awaited sequels — *Caesar III* from Sierra and *Railroad Tycoon II* from Gathering of Developers. Less combative and intense than *StarCraft*, but no less inviting, both did a terrific job of immersing the player in a richly detailed world of empire-building, commerce and micro-management. And both demonstrated that you don't need to be fighting every five minutes to have a fun real-time experience

THE RUNNERS-UP

THIS AIN'T NO SKINS GAME.

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THE BEST SIMULATION

MICROPROSE

Falcon 4.0

It was four years and God only knows how many man-hours in the making, but it's no longer a vaporware legend. *Falcon 4.0* came out in the last days of 1998 and nearly wiped out all memory of the year's other simulations — even great ones like Jane's *F-15* and MicroProse's own *European Air War*.

How did *Falcon 4.0* tear us away from those instant classics? By being the biggest, deepest, most detailed and authentic air combat simulation we've ever seen — and by being a whole lot of fun to play. No previous sim covers so many different systems, so many different weapons, and so many tasks in such detail. From long-range air-to-air engagements to fangs-out dogfighting, from tank-busting to naval strikes, from in-flight refueling to detailed mission planning — it's all here, and it's all beautifully executed.

The game's 575 page manual might scare off some casual PC fighter jocks, but the game's difficulty settings can be dialed down to the point where a 40-page "Cadet's Guide" is all you need to get airborne and start blowing things up. And an exhaustive series of clearly written tutorials and hands-on training missions makes *Falcon 4.0* accessible to any gamer who's ready to take the plunge into the wonderful world of hard-core air combat sims.

One of the best reasons to play a sim is to learn what the real thing is like. No computer simulation can fully recreate the experience of flying a fighter into combat, putting a tank through its paces, or landing a fully loaded 747 at night, but the best sims at least give you an idea of what's required of the men and women who actually do these things — and how much they have to learn before they can begin to do them. *Falcon 4.0* does that better — and in more ways — than any modern fighter simulation yet. (And — oh, yeah — it's drop-dead gor-

THE WINNER

geous on a high powered system.)

Of course, if *Falcon 4.0* had come out just a month later, there'd be no question that Jane's Combat Simulations' *F-15* deserved the award. It's got a lot of the things that make *Falcon 4.0* great: lovely graphics, amazing depth, and widely variable difficulty settings that let you decide just how realistic the experience will be — and it's also got the most accurate simulation of air-to ground radar you'll find in any PC sim.

But what about a good, old-fashioned turn-and shoot simulation? Something set during World War Two, for instance? We got a few of those in 1998, but for the best one, we have to turn once again to MicroProse. *European Air War*, with its swarms of fighters and bombers — 30 or more in a single battle — and perilously faithful flight models that include some heart-stopping spins and stalls, is easily the most engaging and authentic feeling WWII sim of the new, improved

1998 was a great year for simulations; if 1999 is half as good, the biggest problem for sim fans will be deciding how to spend their time and money. That's the kind of problem we like.

THE RUNNERS-UP

THE WINNER

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN MUSIC...

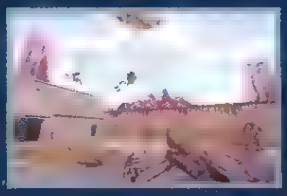
Grand Theft Auto

The advent of Redbook Audio — the technology that allows a game to play CD audio direct from the disc — has produced some great soundtracks: *Jedi Knight* accompanied the action with John Williams' actual *Star Wars* score, not just some flimsy sound card rendition, while last year's award winner *Interstate '76* provided an entire album's worth of funkadelic music. You might think that simply pulling pre-set audio tracks from the CD would restrict how imaginatively the music can accompany the action, but *Grand Theft Auto* from ASC Games dispelled that myth this year with what is, undoubtedly, the year's most innovative and addictive soundtrack. The music on the disc is a sampling of the fictitious FM station "Head Radio," featuring a dizzying mix of hardcore rap, chart countdowns, demented DJs, jingles, and news bulletins. The music changes depending on whose car you're driving — a sleek sportsters' radio will play cool hip-hop, but 'jack a pick-up truck, and you'll hear some good ol' country. Credible and fun enough to warrant playing in the car or at home as a music album in its own right, *Grand Theft Auto*'s conceptually brilliant soundtrack wins it a richly deserved award for Special Achievement in Music.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN SOUND...

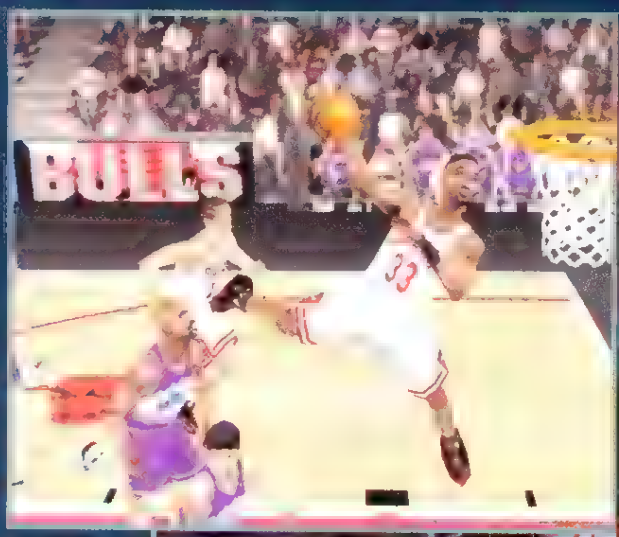
Half-Life

With sound cards and speakers reaching new levels of technical excellence, PC games are sounding better than ever — but just as important as the sound's technical quality is how you use it, as evidenced by this year's Game of the Year. Understanding how important sound is to any immersive experience, Valve created a richly textured aural environment that envelopes the player in the gameworld with a combination of in-your-face shock effects and flesh-crawling ambient sound. The guttural sounds of the pan-dimensional enemies are freakish and scary; the weapons sound beefy and powerful; the radio chatter of soldiers alerts you to their presence nearby; alarm sirens and off-camera cues provide tension; and the ever-present voice of your hazardous environment suit tells you just how much trouble you're in, in a disarmingly calm tone of voice. It all adds up to a deeply satisfying, often terrifying, interactive sound experience that cries out to be played late at night, with the lights way down and the volume way up. *Half-Life* displays outstanding work, and it's a worthy recipient of this year's award for Special Achievement in Sound.



THE BEST SPORTS GAME

NBA Live 99



At last! The stranglehold that EA Sports' NHL series had on this award (it's won the previous two years) has finally been loosened. While *NHL 99* maintained most of the high standards we've come to expect from this series, it slipped up in a few crucial areas, causing it to be toppled from its lofty perch. There were several hungry contenders waiting in the wings, and the new version of one of our runners-up from last year stepped up in a big way to claim the honors.

The fact that professional basketball didn't happen in 1998 due to the NBA lockout didn't prevent EA Sports from hitting new heights with *NBA Live 99*, the latest iteration in its long-running franchise — and for hoops fans, it was almost enough to make up for the absence of the real thing.

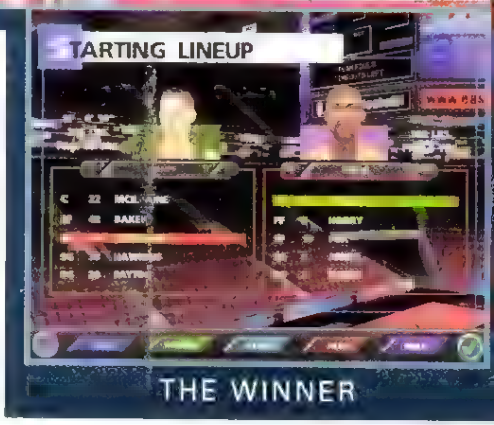
The reason for *Live 99*'s ascension from runner-up to award winner comes down to how much the gameplay and simulation aspects were improved this year. Yes, all facets of the graphics are better than ever, including the most amazing implementation of facial textures yet seen in a sports game, but that's to be expected from EA Sports. More impressive was the way in which the artificial intelligence was tweaked and improved to give any level of player a healthy and rewarding challenge.

Past versions were criticized for being too easy and allowing the player to charge his way to the basket at will (only against the CPU, of course), resulting in a veritable dunk-fest. Things have changed this time around. The computer-controlled players show a degree of intelligence that allows them to fill passing lanes, clog up the middle on defense, box out opponents for rebounds, and just flat-out play a smart game of ball. With a few exceptions (such as blocked shots and steals being on the high side), the stats generated are pretty realistic, and as they should, the super stars will perform head and shoulders above the mediocre talent clogging up the league. What it all boils down to is that *NBA Live 99* is the most fun and challenging sports game of the past year.

EA Sports had another contender this year in *NCAA Football 99*. This turned out to be the year's finest pigskin offering, despite a healthy challenge from EA Sports' own *Madden NFL 99*. What set *NCAA 99* apart was its brilliantly designed running game, smooth animations that conveyed a real sense of momentum, and chance to guide your alma mater into the future using the somewhat abstract but very well implemented Dynasty mode.

Our second runner-up shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. Access has once again graced us with an update to its Links LS series, and while the changes weren't revolutionary, enough was done to keep *Links LS 1999* at the forefront of the very competitive golf category. Three new, meticulously recreated courses, a Modes of Play editor that lets you create any kind of scoring rules you can imagine, and a worthy attempt at a mouse-swing interface are just some of the new additions to what was already one of the finest sports games around.

THE RUNNERS-UP



THE WINNER

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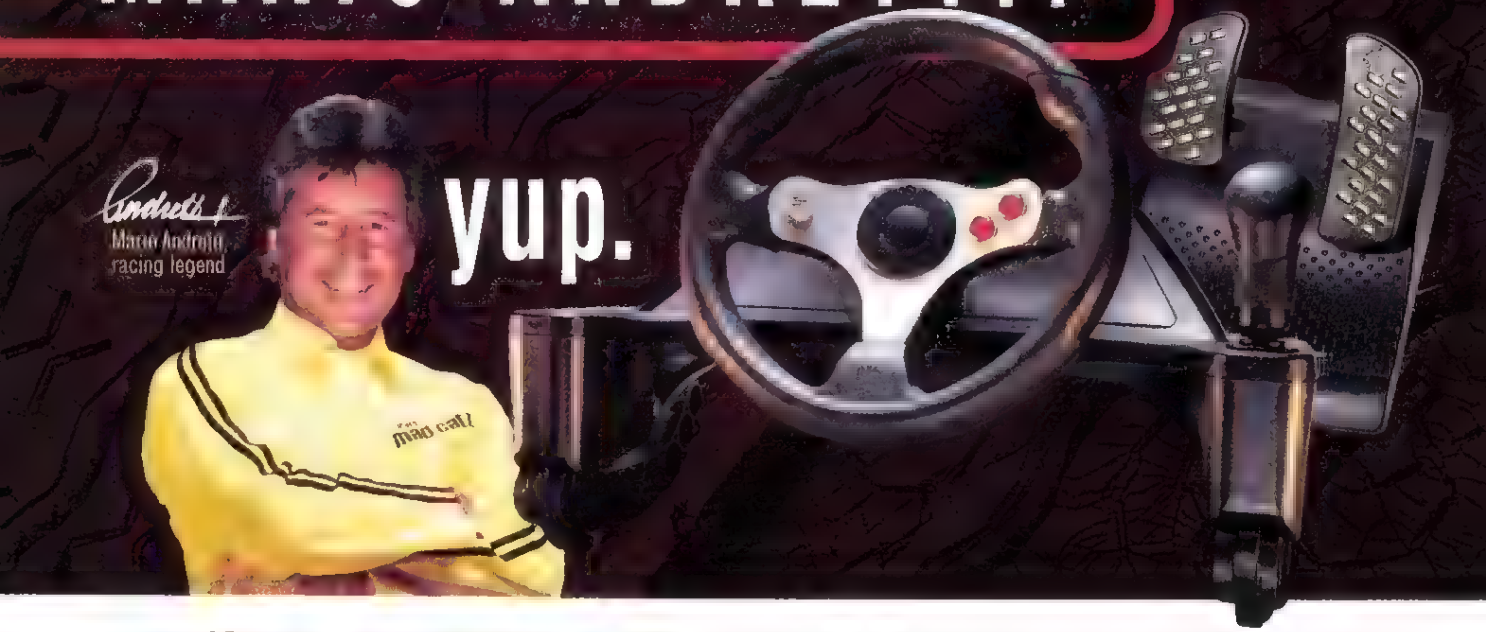

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THE BEST ROLEPLAYING GAME

INTERPLAY

Baldur's Gate

There's been very little for PC roleplayers to get excited about in recent years, but this was the year in which the long-suffering RPG faithful finally got some payback. There was a whole host of great roleplaying games released throughout 1998, but in a great feat of showmanship, the genre went and saved the best for last. The most stunning roleplaying game of the year arrived just as the year was drawing to a close (and, unfortunately, just too late for our full review to make it into this issue, so look out for it next month).

Baldur's Gate has swept players off their feet with its unprecedented attention to detail. Aside from a few small changes, the game sticks closer than glue to TSR's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons ruleset. The beautifully hand-rendered backgrounds are astonishing, with buzzing flies and the occasional bird flying overhead, as well as some of the creepiest dungeons around. The combat system, a mixture of real-time with immediate pausing at any moment, allows gamers the freedom to tactically plan their attacks and defense, while keeping the game flowing smoothly. The huge game world, variety of monsters, enthralling story line, and marvelously intuitive interface makes *Baldur's Gate* a roleplaying gamer's dream, and a title that claims this year's roleplaying award with resounding authority.

THE WINNER

That's not to belittle the runners up in the category, however. *Final Fantasy VII*'s combination of impressive graphics, engrossing story line, addictive gameplay, and large game world means tremendous fun for anyone who appreciates a great adventure. As players take control of Cloud Strife and his merry band of adventurers, they'll venture across an entire world filled with strange creatures, magical wonders, and some of the most emotional moments in PC roleplaying. It was the first game to truly bring console-style roleplaying to the PC, and it did it with gorgeous 3D accelerated graphics and a unique game world

Although the story line wasn't nearly as engrossing as that in *Final Fantasy VII*, the non linear gameplay and multitude of sub quests of *Might and Magic VI* ensure hours and hours of addictive adventuring.

THE RUNNERS-UP

One of the most traditional RPGs to come out in the last couple of years, *Might and Magic VI* takes all of the elements that made its predecessors some of the most popular RPGs in gaming history and, amazingly, improves on them. The combination of turn based and real-time gameplay has carved a path for future roleplaying games to follow, and the sheer number of environments, both indoor and outdoor, means the game will never run short on surprises.

THE BEST RACING GAME

Motocross Madness

THE WINNER

Here at *PC Gamer*, we're all fans of racing games to one degree or another. Some of us prefer the more in-depth simulations, while others enjoy nothing more than putting the pedal to the metal for some all out arcade driving. With the many diverse styles of racers vying for the top spot, picking the winner in this new category proved to be a challenge. There were many fine entrants, but the one game that managed to enthrall every racing maven this year turned out to be of the two-wheeled variety.

Motocross Madness, from developer Rainbow Studio and publisher Microsoft, delivers the perfect mix of speed, control, and mid air acrobatics. The graphics, while somewhat sparse in the details, depict the rolling hills and stadiums beautifully, and the sound of the bike's engine makes you feel as if you have the throttle right there in your hand. On the ground, the physics model gives you an experience very close to what a real dirt bike rider might enjoy, but in the air, the physics are a bit more "relaxed," letting you catch some serious air and show off your stunt riding

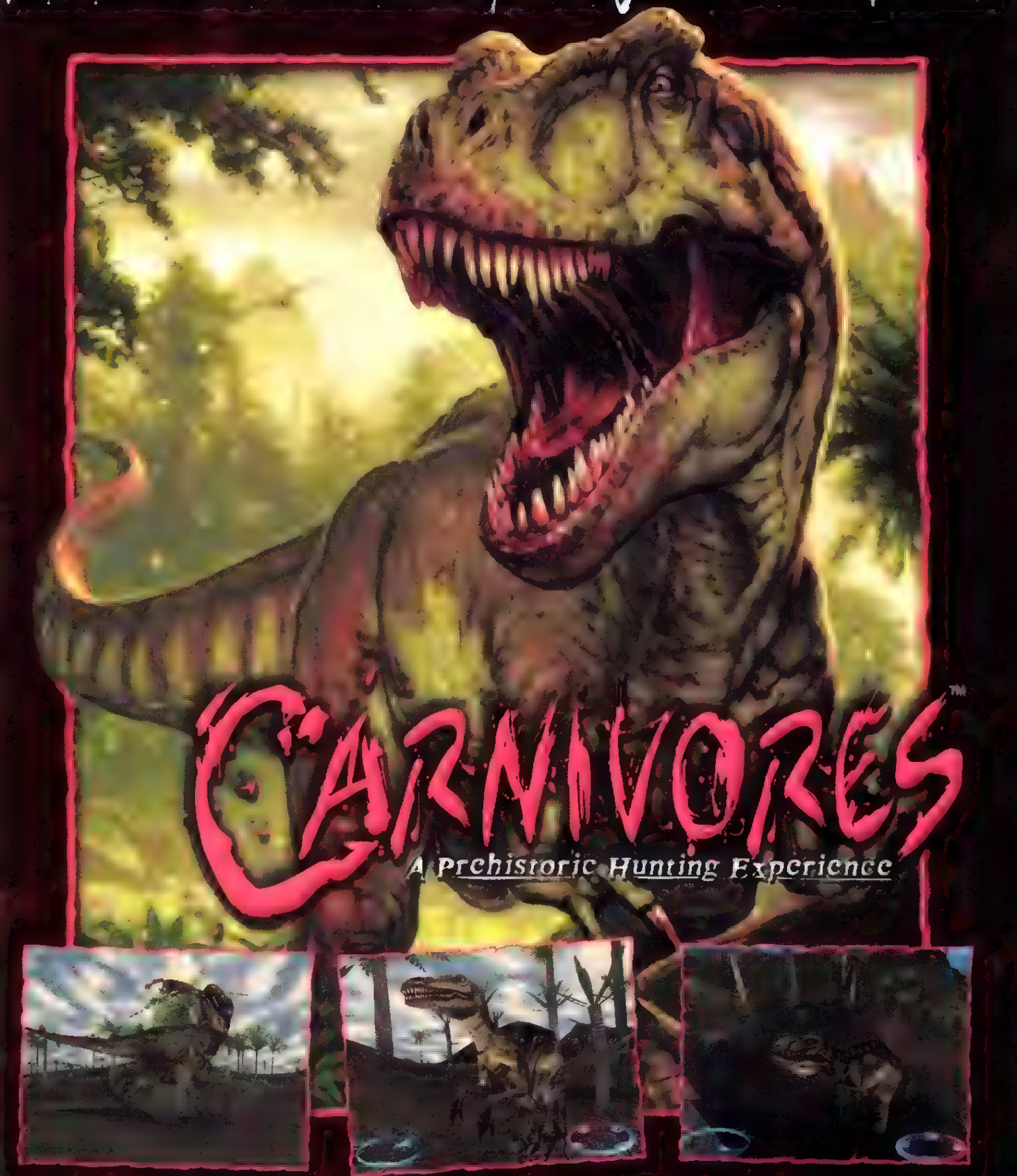
These two very different elements give the game its wide-ranging appeal. If it's serious racing you're after, the indoor stadiums are your best bet. Here you must be in total control of your bike as you carve through hairpin turns, making sure your angle of attack is consistent when hitting or landing the jumps. If crossing the finish line first doesn't thrill you, *Motocross Madness* goes the extra mile with its fabulous stunt competition. Get the bike up to speed, hit a steep incline, and it's takeoff time! While it's not very realistic, it certainly is fun. Sixteen stunts are at your fingertips, and points are awarded based on your time in the air and if you can land without planting your face in the dirt. Add in multi player via LAN or over the Internet (for free), and you have a game that's a blast to play for extended periods or for those times when just a quick ten-minute speed fix is all you require.

Our two runners-up also did the racing genre proud in '98. For a pure arcade rush, it's hard to beat Electronic Arts' thrilling *Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit*. The collection of high-performance cars is truly superb (and EA has kept its promise of releasing new cars on its web site), while the tracks are nicely varied and a sight to behold. Plenty of gameplay options keep the interest and the challenge high, with the chase-or-be-chased Hot Pursuit mode the innovative high point.

Those that were looking for a little depth in their racing game were also well served by *F1 Racing Simulation* from UbiSoft. It did make some concessions to less dedicated drivers with its arcade mode, but true gear-heads have everything they need to emulate their favorite Formula 1 driver. Lip-smacking graphics, a solid physics model, and a full-featured garage for adjusting your vehicle are combined into a package that delivered the goods in a major way. All in all, it was a great year for speed freaks. Bring on this year's batch!

THE RUNNERS-UP

Your ultimate dream and deepest nightmare in the flesh...



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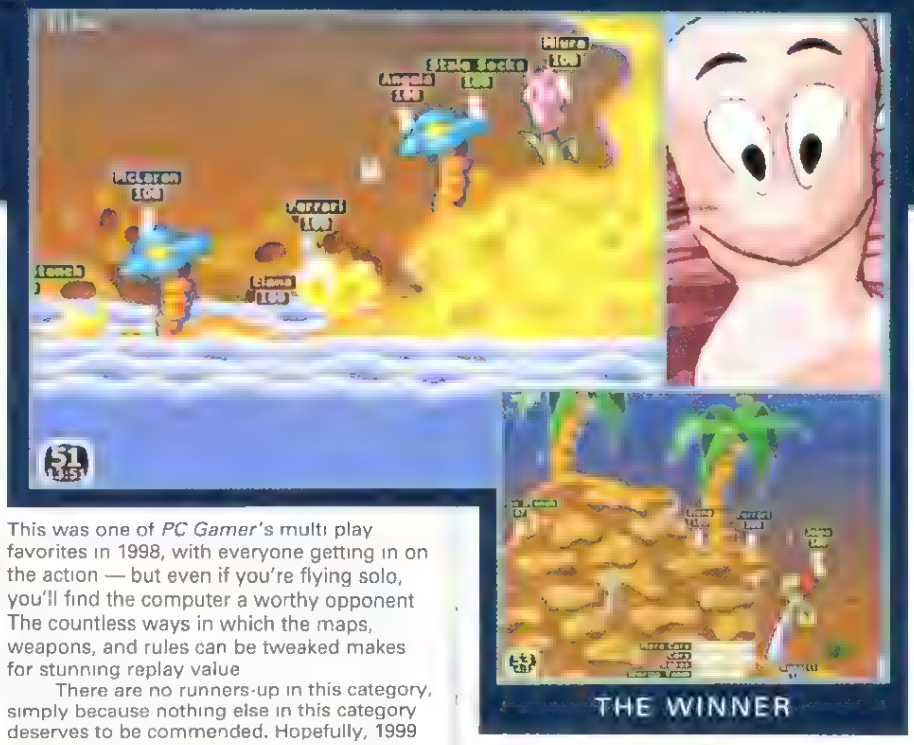
THE BEST TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME

Worms 2



In a year in which the strategy scene was over-run by real-time titles, old-fashioned turn-based gaming was the primary casualty. Though this venerable genre has been in decline for some time, recent years have always thrown up at least a couple of noteworthy efforts — but in 1998, what was there? No new X-COM or Jagged Alliance and a few disappointing offerings like *Soldiers at War*...not exactly a memorable batch. And so, in the absence of anything worthy of an award, it was looking perilously like we might have to put this category on hiatus for a year, as we've done with roleplaying in the past.

And then we remembered *Worms 2*.

To the untrained eye, Team 17's unassuming little game might seem better suited to the action or arcade categories — but play a few rounds, and you'll soon discover that this game relies much more on tactics and cunning than manual dexterity. *Worms 2*'s cartoonish graphics and wacky sense of humor belie its deep and challenging nature, and the utter fiendishness of many of the strategies available adds greatly to the fun.

This was one of *PC Gamer*'s multi play favorites in 1998, with everyone getting in on the action — but even if you're flying solo, you'll find the computer a worthy opponent The countless ways in which the maps, weapons, and rules can be tweaked makes for stunning replay value

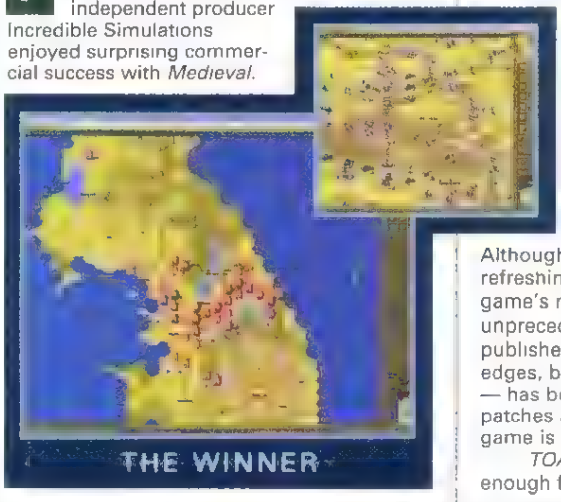
There are no runners-up in this category, simply because nothing else in this category deserves to be commended. Hopefully, 1999 will be a brighter year, with the highly anticipated *Civilization: Call to Power* and *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri* both flying the turn-based flag. In the meantime, *Worms 2* serves as evidence that sometimes a genre's salvation can be found in the unlikeliest of places.

THE WINNER

THE BEST WARGAME

The Operational Art of War

For a genre that "everybody" says is now marginalized, wargames demonstrated once again, in 1998, their perennial hardihood. Even the doughty independent producer Incredible Simulations enjoyed surprising commercial success with *Medieval*.



THE WINNER

This year's award, though, simply *has* to go to Norm Koger's masterpiece *The Operational Art of War*. Koger poured a lifetime of passion and expertise into this grand tactical banquet, and TalonSoft gave him all the time and support he needed to produce the wargame of his dreams. Although the pre-packaged scenarios are refreshingly off-beat and action-packed, the game's major feature is a scenario editor of unprecedented power and flexibility. As published, the game had a few rough edges, but Koger — with Herculean energy — has been squashing bugs and issuing patches and *listening* to his fans, so the game is now as smooth as it is gripping.

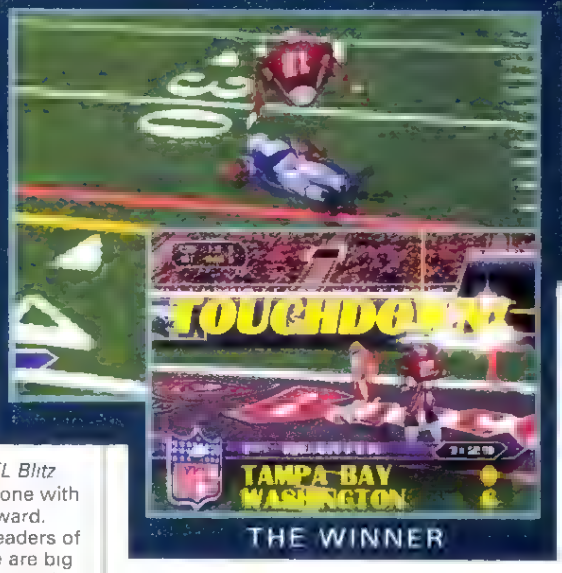
TOAW strikes an ideal balance: It's easy enough for novices to "get it" after an hour or so with the tutorial, but it's deep, rich, and detailed enough to satisfy the crustiest grognard. In any year, this would be a stand out product, but given the number of good-to-great wargames published in 1998, it looms as one of gaming's all-time classics.

THE RUNNER-UP

Meanwhile, SSI staged a grand finale for its *Panzer General* series by issuing *The People's General*, a near future game of grand proportions in which the remnants of NATO and the Russian Army must cooperate to defeat a powerfully resurgent Chinese People's Liberation Army. (Not so implausible; the Pentagon has several operational plans in development for just such a contingency; one stray Chinese missile landing on Japan or Taiwan is all it would take to light the powder keg.) *The People's General*'s great graphics, slick as-paint interface, and new aerial sub-routine all added up to jolly, bloody fun.

THE BEST ARCADE GAME

MIDWAY NFL Blitz



THE WINNER

Laying the smack down on each other is the favorite past time here at *PC Gamer*, and in 1998 one game let us do that with such ferocity and savagery that some of us are still nursing our wounds. We're speaking, of course, about Midway's *NFL Blitz*.

NFL Blitz strips the game of football down to its most basic, animalistic level, and the result is a fast and furious ride. Midway took two parts pro football, one part pro wrestling, tossed out the rules and the refs, and created one of the most enjoyable arcade games ever to blast its way across a PC. The graphics are amazing, and the action is non-stop. Sure, it's about as realistic as your average Jerry Bruckheimer movie, but who cares? What matters here is being able to jump on your opponent's head after the play has ended. With barely a fault to its name, *NFL Blitz* rushes into the endzone with this year's Arcade award.

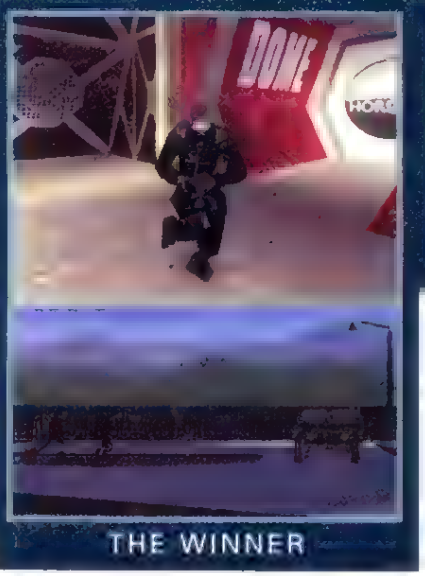
THE RUNNERS-UP

As long-time readers of *PC Gamer* know, we are big fans of zombies. We watch zombie films, read zombie comics, and thanks to Sega's *The House of the Dead*, now we get to blow those undead scum into little bitty chunks. Okay, so it's a port of an arcade game and a rail shooter to boot — so what? The graphics are spiffy, the monsters look cool (especially when they have a gaping hole in their chest), and the multiple paths ensure that you'll come back and blow away the dead time and time again.

With *Star Wars* mania reaching a fever-pitch because of the upcoming release of *Episode One*, LucasArts' *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron 3D* provides the perfect fix for gamers looking to stomp some Imperial butt. From the gorgeous graphics to the cool sound effects and great gameplay, *Rogue Squadron 3D* is an absolute blast. Toss in some hidden levels (such as the Battle of Hoth and the Death Star Trench Run), along with the ability to fly the Millennium Falcon, and you've got a great arcade game

THE BEST MULTI-PLAYER GAME

RED STORM Rainbow Six

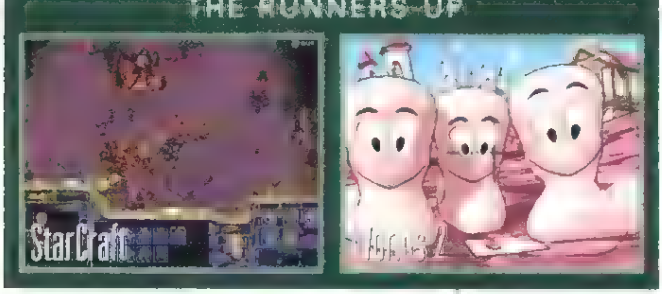


THE WINNER

Up until this year, all first-person multi-player gaming was much the same Common amongst all the different mods and rulesets was the fact that getting shot — even getting killed — wasn't a big deal. You'd simply pick up a healthpack to treat your wounds, and once dead, a single mouse-click was all it took to put you right back in the game, the only loss being any weapons and power-ups you'd collected. The system is fine in its own way, but the term "deathmatch" hardly seems appropriate for a game in which players are gradually conditioned to treat dying as little more than a minor inconvenience.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six changed all that. Its hyper-realistic modeling of weaponry and injuries means that a single well aimed bullet is often enough to incapacitate or kill, and thus careless or reckless play is rewarded with a one-way ticket to the morgue. The result is a considerably more thoughtful, suspenseful — and realistic — game than any first-person shooter to date. As in real combat, the fatal shot often comes when you were least expecting it, making players fearful of every unchecked corner and blind doorway. The final test: the *PC Gamer* team spent many more hours playing this than any other multi-player game this year. For innovation and sheer gut wrenching game-play, *Rainbow Six* wins this year's multi-player award at a comfortable pace.

THE RUNNERS-UP



Another office favorite this year was MicroProse's shamefully addictive *Worms 2*, which shines in multi-player thanks to the wide array of sneaky and inventive tactics available — and a great sense of humor. Not far behind is Blizzard's excellent *StarCraft*, which not only provides some of the most satisfying strategic gameplay to date, but also makes it remarkably accessible thanks to *battle.net*, the free (and fast) Internet gaming service seamlessly integrated into the game's front end

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3D Buyer's Guide

Still confused about which 3D chip is best for *your* PC? Don't fret — we've got all you need to know to nail the decision.

— Greg Vederman

Of all the questions readers ask us, none is more common than, "What video card should I get for my computer?" It's not a simple question, but with this feature we aim to give you the information you need to find the right answer, regardless of the games you play or the system you play them on.

Since August 1998, *PC Gamer* has run video card tests on a PC built around an Intel Pentium II 266MHz processor. Faster CPUs were available when we settled on our test bed, but we decided it was a good middle-ground machine — plenty fast to play any game on the market, but not the kind of 450MHz scorcher that only a handful of gamers can afford.

Still, we get loads of E-mail from readers who do have one of those scorchers — or who are looking to get the most out of their once-hot Pentium 200 machines. Generally speaking, the video card or 3D accelerator that turns in the fastest numbers on our midrange Pentium II will also yield the best performance on machines that are significantly faster or slower. There are occasional differences, however — especially between the PCI-bus version of a card you'd use in your classic Pentium and the AGP-bus version you'd put in a Pentium II.

We decided to settle the matter here by running all our tests on a wide range of current video cards — using not just our overworked 266MHz Pentium II machine with 64MB of RAM, but also a 200MHz Pentium MMX with 32MB and a 450MHz Pentium II with 64MB. On each of the three systems, the tests were run under Windows 98 and DirectX 6.0. Each card was run using the latest driver software available as we went to press.

The chart on the facing page has the tale of the tape; the numbers each video card cranked out in each of the applicable tests. But since speed isn't the only determining factor when choosing a new card, we're also tossing in a brief description of each of the chips used in the top cards.

Video Cards

	Pentium 200 MHz WITH MMX 32MB RAM									Pentium II 266 MHz WITH 64MB RAM									Pentium II 450 MHz WITH 64MB RAM								
	3D Mark 99					Shogo			Quake II																		
	3D MARKS	▲ 16 BIT 1	■ 16 BIT 2	◆ 32 BIT 1	● 32 BIT 2	640x480	800x600	1024x768	640x480	800x600	1024x768	3D MARKS	▲ 16 BIT 1	■ 16 BIT 2	◆ 32 BIT 1	● 32 BIT 2	640x480	800x600	1024x768	640x480	800x600	1024x768	3D MARKS	▲ 16 BIT 1	■ 16 BIT 2	◆ 32 BIT 1	● 32 BIT 2	640x480	800x600	1024x768	640x480	800x600	1024x768
ATI Xpert@Play (PCI)	743	18.3	19.3	—	—	12.1	9.3	7.4	--	--	--	1512	23.2	25.6	—	—	18.3	14.8	10.1	--	--	--	1495	25.5	29.0	—	—	20.4	15.5	14.0	--	--	--
Diamond Monster 3D (PCI)	1112	21.5	20.7	—	—	13.5	—	—	17.4	--	--	1497	24.0	23.2	—	—	20.7	--	--	--	--	--	1423	24.2	24.0	—	—	21.0	--	--	22.3	--	--
Matrox Mystique G200 (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1662	28.4	28.1	16.7	16.4	--	--	--	--	--	--	2048	30.6	25.2	24.4	21.0	31.8	29.9	22.8	--	--	--
Hercules Terminator Beast (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2067	44.2	44.1	44.0	43.9	--	--	--	--	--	--	3067	54.5	47.8	45.7	37.3	33.8	27.6	21.4	50.9	37.2	26.6
Real3D StarFighter (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1966	28.8	21.0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1845	34.7	26.8	--	--	23.6	19.0	13.4	36.5	23.0	13.5
Diamond Stealth G460 (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1563	28.9	21.9	--	--	--	--	--	64.2	22.4	16.1	1840	34.8	25.2	—	—	22.5	20.2	13.0	37.0	22.1	13.2
Diamond Viper V330 (PCI)	1333	23.4	20.9			13.3	8.2	—	16.4	10.9		1888	29.9	25.1			18.4	14.1	--	28.1	16.5	--	1693	30.3	26.8	—	—	14.4	12.7	—	28.2	18.5	—
STB Velocity 128 (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1712	31.3	27.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	16.3	--	1697	31.6	27.8	--	--	15.3	12.5	—	28.7	17.3	--
Diamond Monster Fusion (AGP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2533	43.6	41.2	--	--	--	--	--	58.8	41.0	28.6	2828	51.9	48.4	—	—	37.9	27.7	19.4	63.5	49.6	35.0
Guillemot Maxi Gamer Phoenix (PCI)	1530	23.1	26.7	—		13.2	10.7	7.6	18.9	18.0	10.2	2518	43.5	44.7	--	--	--	--	--	57.3	43.5	28.2	2790	50.2	42.4	—	—	36.7	26.8	20.1	58.6	48.8	31.4
Quantum Obsidian X-24 (PCI)*	1574	23.4	27.0	—		14.9	13.6	8.9	22.3	22.1	14.1	2615	45.7	43.2	--	--	--	--	--	63.5	61.2	44.2	3620	55.5	54.2	—	—	41.2	38.6	25.1	72.4	69.3	53.2
3D Blaster Voodoo2 (PCI)	1475	22.8	26.4	-		12.5	8.7	—	20.8	20.4		2271	42.3	44.5	--	--	--	--	--	56.4	44.2	--	2669	46.9	42.1	—	—	37.7	29.8	—	64.1	44.5	—
Diamond Monster 3D II (PCI)	1480	22.7	27.1	—		11.9	9.2		20.2	21.2	—	2253	43.3	41.7	--	--	--	--	--	55.5	41.8	--	2668	46.8	41.8	—	—	38.0	29.9	—	64.9	45.4	—
STB Velocity 4400 (PCI)	1230	23.2	21.6	18.4	17.1	14.2	12.8	9.8	19.0	21.5	18.3	2133	33.6	37.5	29.2	28.3	28.0	28.1	19.6	38.5	50.8	38.0	2689	43.1	46.5	36.9	38.2	29.5	26.9	21.2	67.3	54.0	35.3
Diamond V550 (AGP)	--	—	--	--		--	--	—	--	--	--	2185	34.8	37.3	30.2	31.8	30.3	28.6	22.3	38.5	51.2	38.1	2692	44.2	47.6	37.1	38.9	32.5	26.6	21.7	69.4	54.7	36.1

KEY: ▲16 BIT 1—Third person perspective racing game, ■ 16 BIT 2—First person perspective action game, ◆ 32 BIT 1—same as 16 BIT 1 in 32-Bit color, ● 32 BIT 2—same as 16BIT 2 in 32-Bit color
* Quantum Obsidian X-24 is the single-board equivalent of two 12MB Voodoo2 cards running in scan line interleave mode.

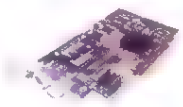
The Contenders: The Chips that Power 3D

ATI Rage Pro (PCI and AGP bus, 2D/3D integrated solution; used in ATI's Xpert@Play): Roughly as fast as 3Dfx's original Voodoo Graphics chipset in Direct3D, but Windows 95 OpenGL drivers have yet to materialize. Image quality is less than stellar when compared to any other current chip.

3Dfx Voodoo Graphics (PCI bus 3D add-in solution used in Diamond Monster 3D): The Voodoo Graphics has support for Direct3D, Glide, and OpenGL – the top three 3D standards – but hits its performance ceiling on a high-end Pentium MMX machine. Image quality is good, but if you've got a Pentium II processor you'll be better served by picking a board using more current technology. So go ahead and read on...

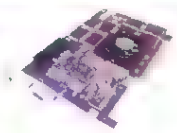
NVIDIA RIVA 128 (PCI and AGP bus, 2D/3D integrated solution, used in STB Velocity 128 and Diamond Viper V330): NVIDIA compromised a bit in key areas to ensure that its chip was the fastest contender in 1997, the RIVA 128 should only be selected if price is a major concern. It's a bit faster than the Voodoo Graphics, but visual quality isn't as nice. The RIVA 128 supports Direct3D and OpenGL.

Intel i740 (AGP bus, 2D/3D integrated solution, used in Real3D StarFighter and Diamond Stealth G460): If you're looking for a video card that has very good image quality and an abundance of 3D features, one that uses the i740 chip is an excellent choice. Speed, however, is not this chip's strong suit. The i740 supports Direct3D and OpenGL.

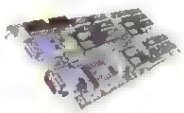


S3 Savage 3D (AGP bus; 2D/3D integrated solution; used in Hercules Terminator Beast): Zippy and attractive in Direct3D, in OpenGL, the Savage 3D is plagued by a recently improved, but still grainy, OpenGL implementation, which means poor image quality in *Quake II* and other games based on that engine (*Half Life*, *SiN*, *Heretic II*, etc.). Faster than a single Voodoo2 in Direct3D (and sometimes faster in OpenGL), the Savage is still a good choice for gamers looking for a good 2D/3D card to go along with one or two Voodoo2s.

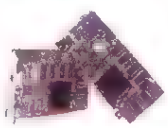
Matrox G200 (AGP bus, 2D/3D integrated solution, used in Matrox Mystique G200): Very nice Direct3D image quality and speed, but still lacking a finalized OpenGL driver. In its current state, it would be best to pair it with a Voodoo2 – unless you don't expect to run OpenGL based games; make sure to check your games for D3D functionality.



3Dfx Voodoo Banshee (PCI and AGP bus; 2D/3D integrated solution used in Diamond Monster Fusion and Maxi Gamer Phoenix): The best choice for the casual gamer, the Banshee is every bit as fast as a single Voodoo2 in most games, but it has the added benefit of being a single slot, integrated 2D/3D solution. The Voodoo Banshee supports Direct3D, OpenGL, and Glide.



3Dfx Voodoo2 (PCI bus, 3D add-in solution, used in Diamond Monster 3D II, Creative Labs 3D Blaster Voodoo2 and Quantum3D Obsidian X-24): The ultimate in 3D only add-in cards, as we go to press. Only the RIVA TNT can compete with the sheer frame rates that two Voodoo2-based cards (linked in scan line interleave, or SLI, mode) can muster. Even a single Voodoo2 makes a great addition to just about any rig out there. The Voodoo2 supports Direct3D, OpenGL, and Glide.

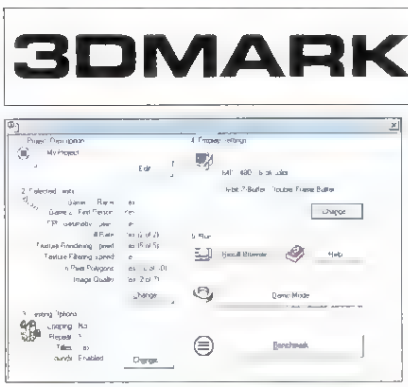


NVIDIA RIVA TNT (PCI and AGP bus, 2D/3D integrated solution; used in STB Velocity 4400 and Diamond Viper V550): The best of the best, the RIVA TNT offers uncompromising speed and image quality while delivering competitive 2D performance. Many games run faster on TNT than on dual Voodoo2s, even when they don't, they often look better on the TNT. The RIVA TNT supports Direct3D and OpenGL.

Benchmarks: How We Dare to Compare

With 3D technology changing signifi cantly a couple of times a year, it's often necessary to upgrade the set of tests we use to evaluate the latest video cards Just this month, we've dropped performance tests based on *MDK*, *Quake*, and *X* in favor of FutureMark's new 3DMark 99 Pro benchmark suite and a cus tomized test built on Monolith Productions' *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*. For the purposes of this fea ture, we used those two and — of course — *Quake II* Here's what each test does

3DMark 99 Pro:
• Comprehensively tests Microsoft DirectX 6.0 features and functionality
• Uses a real-world 3D game engine MAX-FX, the foundation of the upcoming *Max Payne*, from Remedy Entertainment and 3D Realms.



This new benchmarking utility allows us to test all of DirectX 6 0's advanced 3D features

At its most basic, 3DMark 99 Pro runs several different tests, then churns out a single number expressed in "3D Marks" — that provides a good overall indicator as to how fast a given 3D accelerator can run games under Direct3D It also yields a number for each test that factors into the fina. number. At *PC Gamer*, a 3DMark 99 score consists of the overall 3D Mark score (run at a screen resolution of 640x480 in 16 bit color with a 16 bit Z buffer and double buffering), as well as four additional scores, expressed in frames of animation per second, taken from the individual tests two in 16-bit color and two in 32 bit color if a given card supports this higher color depth. With all of the useful information this test cranks out, 3DMark 99 is proving to be one of the best tools we've seen for determining how fast a 3D card will be in real world gaming

Shogo Benchmark:
• Tests Microsoft DirectX 6.0 performance
• Uses a custom designed version of *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*

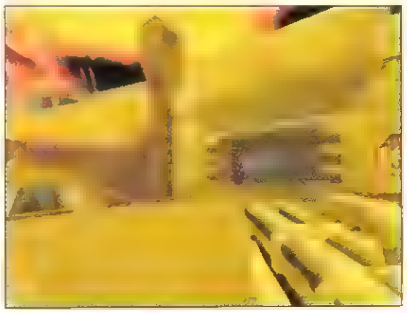
When we began looking to upgrade our benchmark suite for the video card and system reviews we do in The Hard Stuff section every month, we wanted to make certain we based our tests on real-world game engines that truly give the hardware a workout, rather than using abstract tests that can be fooled by creatively tweaking driver software – sometimes at the expense of actual game performance What we wanted was something to complement the tests we already used, and we found that in Monolith's *Shogo Mobile Armor Division* and the LithTech Engine at its heart. Originally intended as a Microsoft product called the DirectEngine, LithTech was going to be the premier 3D gaming engine for DirectX 6.0 – until Monolith and Microsoft had a parting of ways, and Monolith was left with sole rights As *Shogo* and *Blood II* prove, the LithTech engine is still a fantastic test of a card's Direct3D performance, just as *Quake II* is for the other major 3D standard, OpenGL. We run our *Shogo* Benchmark at 640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768 to show how a video card performs at higher resolutions under Direct3D an important feature in 1999

Shogo Mobile Armor Division's blend of fast-paced action and in-your-face visuals make it the perfect choice for a real-world benchmark.

Quake II Benchmark:
• Tests OpenGL performance.
• Uses Demo Map1 from the full version of *Quake II* (3.14).

An older benchmark by today's standards, *Quake II* is still the best test of a 3D card's OpenGL performance You can run this one on your own system if you have the full version of *Quake II* installed on your computer. In the Video Options menu, select either 3Dfx OpenGL (or Default OpenGL if you're testing a card that supports OpenGL but isn't based on a 3Dfx chip like the Voodoo2 or Voodoo Banshee). Next, make sure the CD Music option is turned off and that Sound Quality is set to "Low; Max Compatibility." As far as graphics options are concerned, make sure you are running 8-bit textures and are in full-screen mode. After you've made all of these changes, you're ready to test. Hit the ` key the one that's directly below the Esc key — to bring down *Quake II*'s control console, then type TIMEDEMO 1, hit Enter, type TEST DEMO1 DM2, and smack Enter one more time. The game will run through the demo clip once, as fast as the video card can manage it then the console will drop back down and display the card's speed in average frames per second. It's a good idea to run the test a few times to make sure all the graphic textures are loaded into memory; otherwise, they'll be read from the hard drive, which means the results you get will be dependent on the drive's speed - they won't be a measure of pure video performance. Be sure to close the game and run it again — or type TIMEDEMO 0 at the console before you try to play *Quake II* again; otherwise it'll continue to run as fast as the video card will allow (which is too fast for the average human gamer)

PCG



Quake II Still the best choice when it comes to testing a card's OpenGL performance.

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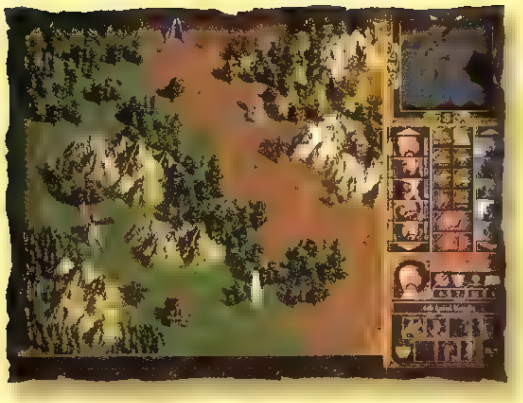
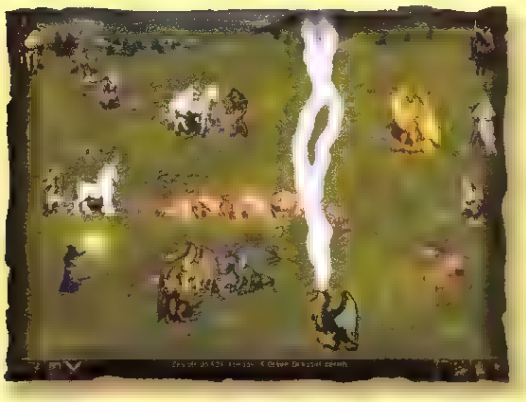


EPIC BATTLES OF STRATEGY AND HONOR



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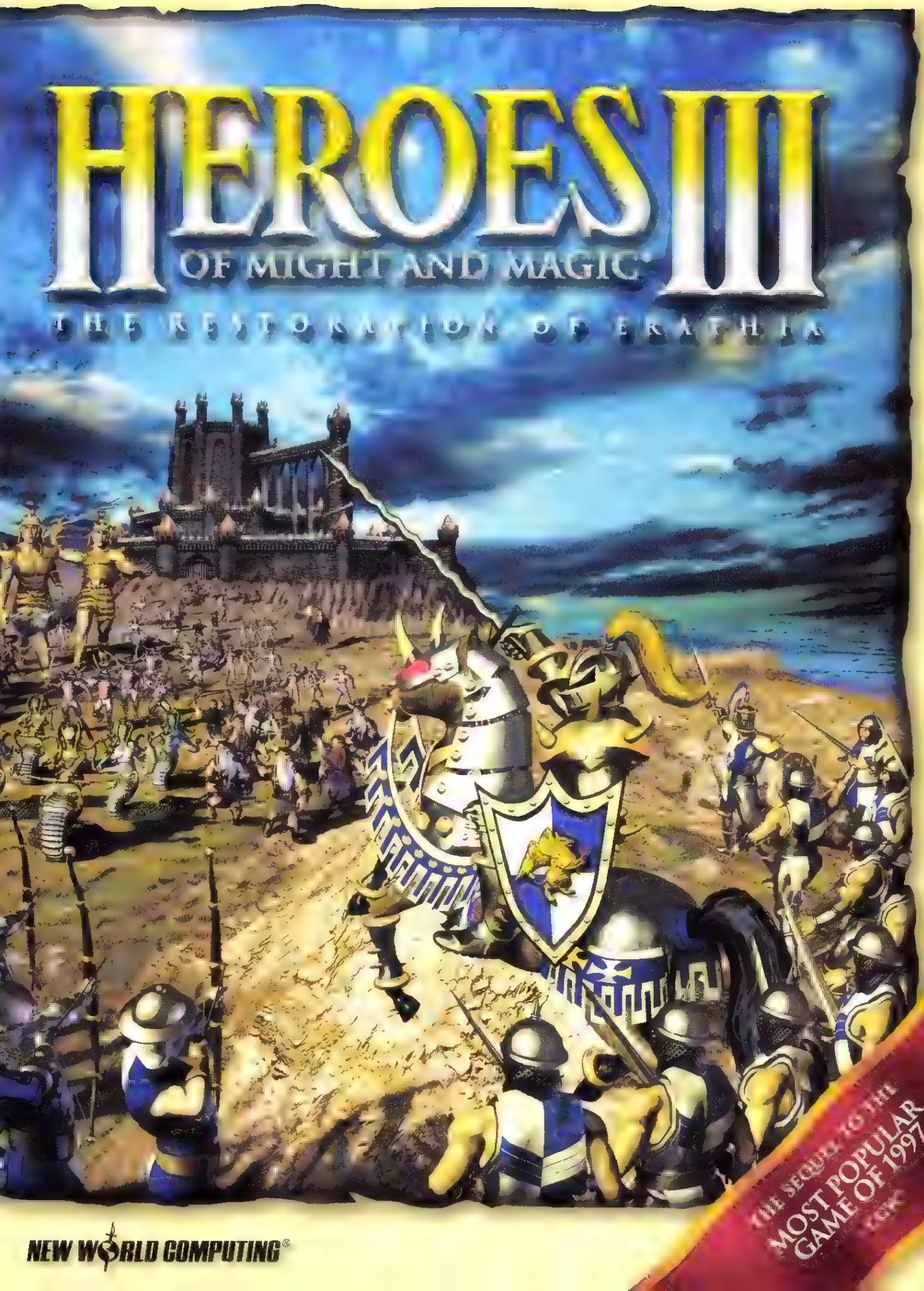
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Another Year, Another (Broken) Promise

As the March issue goes to press, we've just finished celebrating the rollover to the new year of 1999. Just like the rest of you, we've made a barrel-full of resolutions that sounded good in theory but have no real chance of ever being kept.

GARY WHITTA

RESOLUTION Lose weight by cutting back on cheap fast food and alcohol
OBSTACLES Bucket month, an XXL bottle of Wild Turkey within easy reach, Jack's Ultimate Bacon Cheeseburgers
PREDICTED RESULTS A slowly expanding waistline and extensive liver damage

GREG VEDERMAN

RESOLUTION Quit smoking and to stop torturing us with his love-life travails
OBSTACLES Rob waving those cancer sticks under his nose and a long history of heartbreaks
PREDICTED RESULTS A two-pack-a-day habit and emotional torment for life

MIKE LUTON

RESOLUTION To order something other than a cheeseburger from a restaurant
OBSTACLES His friends Jack, Carl, Wendy, and Ronald
PREDICTED RESULTS Will take one bite into a non-burger related food product - and subsequently keel over and die

DAN BENNETT

RESOLUTION Making sure the copy he needs to edit is in to the art guys on time
OBSTACLES Vederman
PREDICTED RESULTS Will have to be institutionalized after being found drooling in a corner and repeating, "He said it would be in *last* Friday"

BILLY HARMS

RESOLUTION Stop using the term "tata, mofo"
OBSTACLES First person shooters, flight sims, action games, fighting games, etc
PREDICTED RESULTS Not gonna happen; Billy's too set in his ways and can't be bothered to change

ROB SMOLKA

RESOLUTION To make sure that the rest of the staff fails to follow through on their New Year's resolutions
OBSTACLES None to speak of since the rest of the staff has no will power
PREDICTED RESULTS A fun year for Rob

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or above — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.

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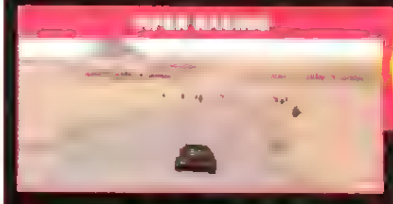

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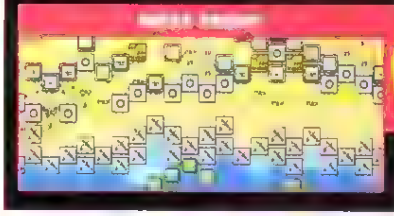

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Falcon 4.0

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY Simulation DEVELOPER: MicroProse PUBLISHER MicroProse, (800) 656 5443, *www microprose com*
REQUIRED Windows 95; Quad speed CD ROM drive; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 350MB hard-drive space; 800x600 graphics with 16-bit color; DirectX-compatible sound card; Joystick WE RECOMMEND 300MHz Pentium II; 64MB RAM, 510MB hard-drive space, 3D accelerator (Direct3D or 3Dfx), Joystick, Throttle, and Rudder controls MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS 28 8Kbps, Serial Link; LAN (TCP/IP only), Internet

After four years, the most ambitious air combat sim ever conceived becomes one of the best sims ever made.

Yes, *Falcon 4.0* is finally finished, and it's big, it's beautiful, and it's amazingly deep and complex.

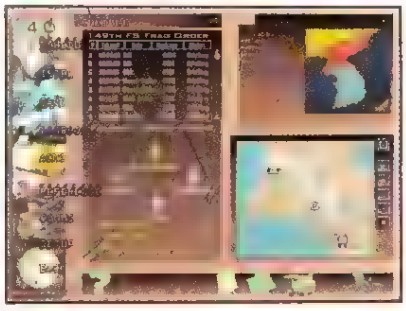
I have to confess this up front· When I found out that *Falcon 4.0* had finally been sent for duplica tion and would soon be in stores, I wasn't terribly excited.

I'm one of the few air combat fans who wasn't crazy about *Falcon 3.0*. And we'd been hearing about the sequel for four years; I was just about convinced it was never coming out. Besides, there's an unspoken rule in the PC gaming industry that says games that spend more than a few years in development are usually disappointing, since they were probably troubled from the start (look at *Stonekeep* and *Battlecruiser 3000AD*, for example) And, finally, when MicroProse released a demo of *Falcon 4.0* about a year ago, it didn't exactly inspire confidence; the graphics were pretty, but it was really choppy and unstable

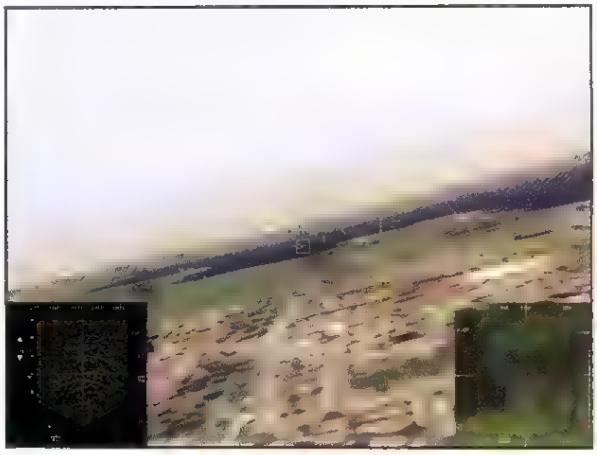
I should've remembered the example of MicroProse's own *X-COM*: it proved that an unimpressive demo doesn't mean the final version won't be fantastic. *Falcon 4.0* follows that rule And it also proves that when we have to wait years for a game to be released, sometimes it's because the development team really is about to pull off something big and ambitious. Sometimes.

Falcon 4.0 is definitely big and ambitious. The game's hefty manual makes that abundantly clear· it weighs in at a bug squashing 575 pages, and there's very little surplus information

More than a third of the manual is devoted to 31 detailed tutorials that cover everything from taking off and turning the plane to dropping laser-guided bombs and evading enemy missiles. Every tutorial first explains the concepts behind what you're about to do, then it gives you a training mission to load up in the game and tells you exactly what to expect and which buttons to push. The game's learning curve is a long one, but thanks to the tutorials, it's not too steep.



The real-time, dynamic campaign offers a constantly changing list of missions with enough variety to satisfy any joystick jockey.



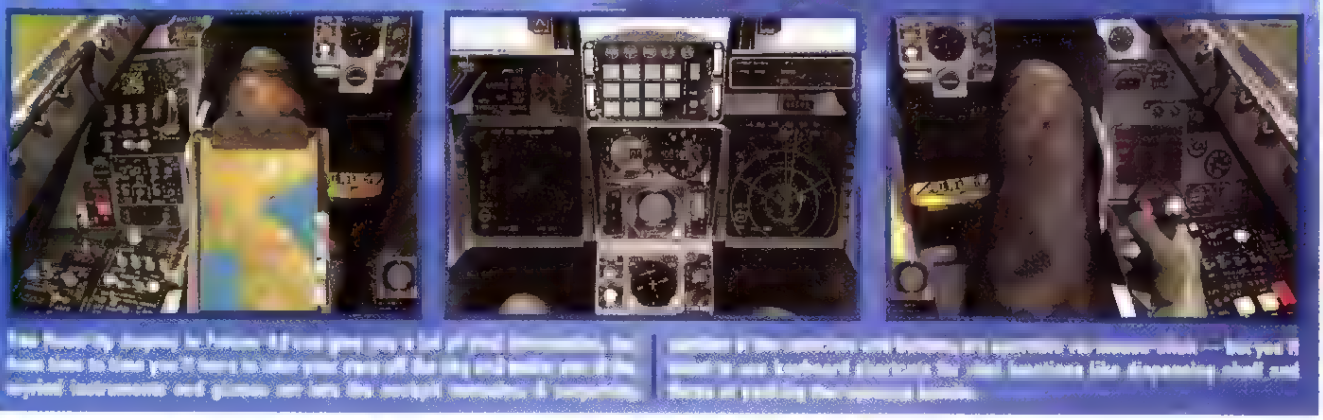
As the air battle unfolds, a full-fledged ground war rages below. Check out the smoke trails as armored units on both sides fire at each other.

Before you commit to a mission, you can study recon images of the target. Here's an enemy radar system that's not long for this world.

All that training is definitely in order; *Falcon 4.0* is the deepest, most complex air combat sim yet. True to the real F-16 Fighting Falcon's multi-role capabilities, *Falcon 4.0* offers a wide range of mission types, including fighter sweeps, escort missions; airfield and interdiction strikes, naval strikes, support of ground troops; suppression of enemy air defenses; and reconnaissance. To be effective, you'll have to learn to use the air-to-air radar (four modes, each with its own submodes), air-to ground radar (three modes, plus

http://pc.ign.com

Head Down



submodes). HARM and Maverick targeting systems, laser targeting pod, and about 20 different weapons.

If all of that sounds like too much, it's possible *Falcon 4.0* isn't for you. On the other hand, there's a good sized group of gamers out there who drool at the prospect of a sim this complex and involved. For them, *Falcon 4.0* will be a dream come true — for everyone else, the designers have included several options for toning down the realism until it's nearly arcade-easy. A supplemental Cadet's Guide explains how to play the game at the easiest levels in just 40 pages.

It's arguable, though, that playing this game with all the realism turned down is like buying a Lamborghini Diablo and never driving it faster than 55 m.p.h. It's worth learning to play the game the way it was meant to be played; that's when its real-time, dynamic campaign system really shines.

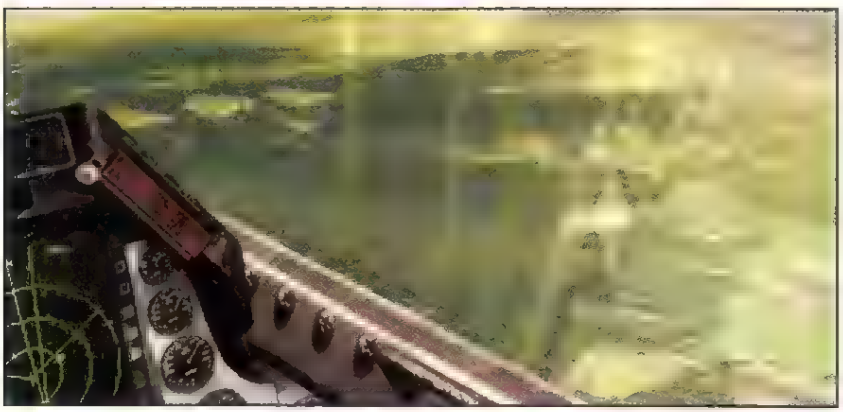
As in DID's *Total Air War*, a session with *Falcon 4.0*'s campaign begins with a list of missions currently available and lets you choose the one you'll fly. Unlike *TAW*, the campaign in *Falcon 4.0* includes a ground war that changes to reflect the success of the air war — and it lets you fly cooperatively with friends.

The campaign also creates the greatest sense yet of playing a small but important part of a huge battle, rather than being Rambo in the sky. You can

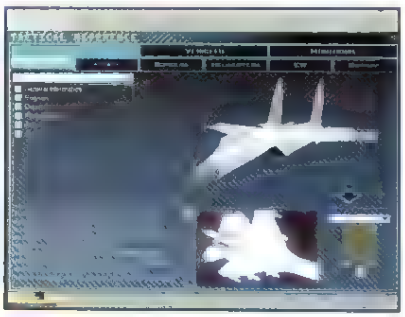
The hardest thing about multi-player dogfights will be deciding who gets to use this Thunderbirds-inspired paint scheme.

see and hear the air battle unfolding through radio chatter, and you can often see the results of the ground war in distant explosions and dust clouds. In fact, it's pretty exciting just to put your plane under control of the Combat autopilot (the same system that handles all the computer-controlled planes), turn on invulnerability, and activate the Action View, which automatically switches between external views to follow the most interesting events on the battlefield.

That's also a good way to enjoy the game's graphics, which are amazing at the highest detail levels. Of course, that means having a system that far outstrips what MicroProse lists as a minimum



Check out how your cockpit's interior is reflected on the transparent canopy; it looks great, and it's a handy positional reference in virtual cockpit mode.



The built-in Tactical Reference contains detailed information on nearly all of the vehicles and systems in the game. You can even click on the speaker icon to hear what a fighter's or SAM's radar sounds like through your warning receiver.

Falcon 4.0 is gorgeous on a 450MHz Pentium II with 128MB RAM and a Voodoo2 accelerator, and it's very nice on a 300MHz Pentium II with 64MB RAM and a RIVA TNT — but I wouldn't even attempt to play it on a 166MHz Pentium with 32MB and no 3D acceleration.

Falcon 4.0 has a few other problems, too. Missions can take 90 seconds or more to load, even on a fast machine. And while there are no huge, glaring bugs, there are a number of niggling problems and visual glitches that need fixing.

Still, *Falcon 4.0* joins the likes of *Longbow 2* and Jane's *F-15* on the very short list of amazingly big, deep, and complete air combat simulations. If you're a hard core sim fan with the hardware to handle it, you need this game.

Dan Bennett

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

95%

HIGHS: Unprecedented depth; detailed tutorials; beautiful graphics.

LOWS: Steep hardware requirements; a few bugs and graphic glitches.

BOTTOM LINE: Can you believe it? It's finally out — and the four-year wait was well worth it.

Rogue Squadron 3D

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Arcade DEVELOPER: Factor 5/LucasArts PUBLISHER: LucasArts, (888) 532-4263, *www.lucasarts.com*
REQUIRED: Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator (3Dfx or Direct3D-compatible)
WE RECOMMEND: 16x CD-ROM drive; Pentium II 233; 64MB RAM; Voodoo2 graphics card MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS: None

After several hit-and-miss attempts, LucasArts' Star Wars license finally manages to hit arcade paydirt.

The ultimate fantasy of every Star Wars fan is to be an active participant in one of the film's epic battles. After all, who hasn't dreamed of flying an X-Wing through the trenches of the Death Star or zipping though Beggar's Canyon with a squad of TIE Fighters on his tail? Gamers got a small taste of the good life with the Hoth mission in *Shadows of the Empire*, and they quickly demanded more. With *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron 3D* those dreams have been answered, and the result is a great game that perfectly captures what it must feel like to slug it out with Darth Vader and his cronies.

Formed after the destruction of the Death Star and headed up by Luke Skywalker and Wedge Antilles, the Rogue Squadron consists of twelve of the Alliance's most skilled pilots. Playing as Luke, you lead your team into action against Imperial targets all across the galaxy, attacking cargo trains, rescuing folks, and destroying key military targets. Unlike the previous Star Wars-themed space combat games on the PC, however, *Rogue Squadron 3D* is neither a *TIE Fighter*-style sim nor a *Rebel Assault*-style rail shooter.

Employing either third- or first-person views, this game is an arcade shooter from beginning to end; you're given three lives per level, and there are no advanced commands for your wingmen or targeting options for your secondary weapons. It's just aim and fire. And while the videogame feel may turn off die-hard sim enthusiasts, the game provides a great sense of atmosphere that helps elevate what could have been some tedious gameplay. *Rogue Squadron 3D* is peppered with great little touches, like stormtroopers hopping on speeder bikes and riding away as you attack their base, or the chatter of your wingmen as they engage the enemy. The best level in the game, however, is "Prisons of Kessel," which has you escorting a transport ship freeing rebels from Imperial prisons. While clearing the sky of TIE Fighters, you can watch rebels commandos leave their ship and enter the prison; as they come back out, stormtroopers pour out of a nearby bunker and engage them. Touches like that help immerse you in the experience and make you forget that you're just playing a game.

A Stars Wars game just wouldn't be complete unless you got to fly some cool ships. Once again, *Rogue Squadron 3D* delivers the goods. All the classics are here, from the trusty X-Wing to the Y-Wing and A-Wing, and they're backed up by the brand-new V-Wing. You'll need that firepower because you'll be going up against TIE Fighters, TIE Bombers, AT-ATs, and other assorted Imperial vehicles. There are also two bonus ships that you can access as you progress through the game; we don't want to spoil the surprise — but one of them is "the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy."

As the second LucasArts game to require a 3D accelerator card, *Rogue Squadron 3D* has the pretty visuals to go along with its great gameplay. The ships look good even in lower resolutions (and they look fantastic at 1024x768), and the terrain and cities look spiffy as well. The coolest effect has to be when you blow up an enemy ship; they either crash to the ground in a ball of flames or explode outright, littering the sky with debris and smoke. Unfortunately, the fog effect (no doubt a holdover from the console version) is overdone; there should've been an option to toggle it on or off, or at least increase the viewing distance for faster machines.

The only real downsides to *Rogue Squadron 3D* are that the game is awfully short, and there's no multiplayer — both of which reduce the game's replay value. There are three secret missions included with the game, and after finishing all the levels you can replay them using any of the ships, but even those two factors don't add enough meat to the game's bones.

Those niggles aside, *Rogue Squadron 3D* is a great ride that provides all the Empire butt-stomping you can handle in a game. Sure, it's a console port, but when the action is this much fun, who cares?

William "I lost R2!" Harms

The Y-Wing is the perfect heavy bomber. Its secondary fire mode is a smart-bomb you can use with pin-point accuracy. Just look out for the TIEs.

While they were only a pain in the neck in the movies, the probe droids are now full-fledged combat vehicles. They usually travel in clusters, so watch your back.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

88%

HIGHS: Great graphics; fast action; lots of cool little touches.

LOWS: Short; no multi-play; some gamers won't like console action.

BOTTOM LINE: If you like your Star Wars action quick and to the point, *Rogue Squadron 3D* belongs in your collection.

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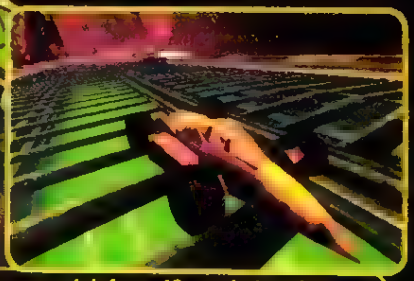

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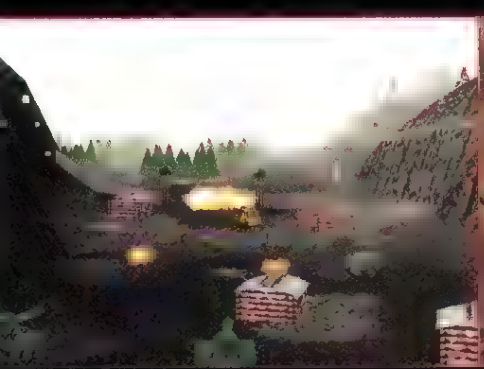

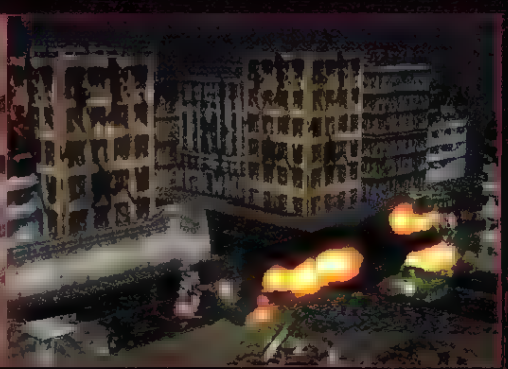

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In the year 2085 the Collapse came hard and fast. Only a select few had the strength and intelligence to rebuild the world from the embers of a nuclear holocaust. You were one of them.

Warzone 2100 showcases a depth of play never seen before in a strategy game. 400 different types of technologies allow you to design and build more than 2000 battle units. That's right. Unit designs aren't predetermined for you. Use your own wits to create an unbeatable battle arsenal.

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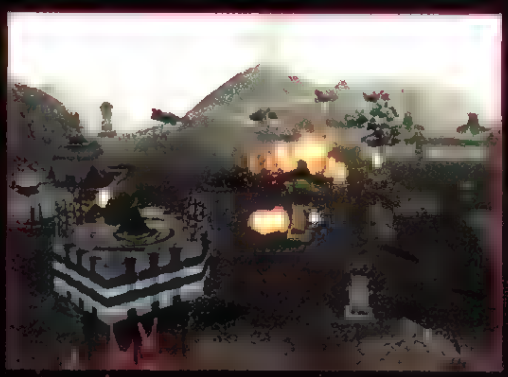
WARZONE 2100

STRATEGY BY DESIGN



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King's Quest: Mask of Eter

CATEGORY Adventure DEVELOPER Sierra Studios PUBLISHER Sierra (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com* REQUIRED Pentium 166MHz, 4x CD-ROM drive, 32MB RAM; Windows 95/98, 400+ MB hard drive space, DirectX compatible sound card, DirectX compatible video card, mouse WE RECOMMEND Pentium II 266MHz or faster; 64MB RAM or greater, 3Dfx or D3D compatible video card; 32x CD-ROM drive MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS None

Roberta Williams proves once again she doesn't shy away from change — but many will be left wondering why she fixed something that wasn't broken in the first place.

Whatever else you say about Roberta Williams, you certainly can't call her complacent. Besides creating the innovative and highly successful *Phantasmagoria*, Williams has continually revamped the hugely popular King's Quest series, constantly exploring new ways to draw would-be adventurers into the enchanting medieval world of Daventry.

With *King's Quest: Mask of Eternity*, though, Williams and the King's Quest development team just might have outdone themselves. The interface has been completely overhauled, with the familiar point-and-click movement and perspective replaced by an option to play from either a first-person view or a *Tomb Raider*-style perspective that allows you to pan and zoom the "camera" at will. Combat in previous King's Quest games was almost non-existent, but in *Mask of Eternity* you'll be faced with it from start to finish, it might not take up the lion's share of actual play time, but there'll be points during the game where it sure feels that way. And longtime King's Quest fans eager to catch up on the doings of characters like King Graham, Prince Alexander, and Princess Rosella will be shocked to learn that the only inhabitant of Daventry found in the game (aside from a couple of very minor characters) is the hero himself.

Naturally, some followers of the series feel a little betrayed by such major changes, even going so far as to say this isn't a King's Quest game at all. But while Williams is to be commended for taking the chance of alienating King's Quest veterans in pursuit of her artistic vision, she's to be chided for not ensuring that the changes were implemented in a way that made the game more immersive and enjoyable. Almost everywhere you look in *Mask of Eternity* — story, combat, characters, control, and even saved games — you'll find that

To defeat this dragon, all you have to do is figure out how to jump on him from above — provided you've acquired the weapon to slay him, that is.

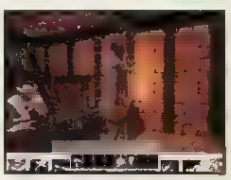
The Seven Realms of Mask of Eternity

Despite the horrendous load times between levels, one of the best features of *Mask of Eternity* is the diversity of the worlds Connor explores as he tries to recover the missing pieces of the Mask. With distinct environments and unique enemies, the variety of worlds he visits lends an epic air to his quest.

Daventry: Connor's journey begin in his hometown of Daventry. This wizard will lay out your course of action, but before rushing off to find the Dimension of Death, make sure you explore every single house and building in the village.

The Dimension of Death: Mummies and skeletal warriors abound in the Dimension of Death, but the real challenge lies in using the clues provided by the Boatman to unlock the gate in front of the Bridge of Life.

The Swamp: There are several types of deadly critters roaming the swamp — and your travels are made even more perilous by huge pools of poisonous water. To purify the swamp you must slay this witch and find a way to disable her magical cauldron.



The Underground Realm of the Gnomes: Finally, a place to spend all the gold dropped by the enemies you've slain! If you don't have enough gold to upgrade your weapons and armor *and* purchase the essence of Sun Tzu, go for the weapons instead.

The Barren Region: These lava-dwelling dragons can pop up at a moment's notice in the Barren Region, so keep your bow at the ready.

The Frozen Reaches: The yeti-like creatures that roam the Frozen Reaches might not move very quickly, but what they lack in speed they make up for in sheer numbers. Make sure you have room to retreat as you fire arrows at them.

The Realm of the Sun: Pay close attention to the whispered voices you hear in this room full of Archons; they provide clues that reveal the story of the broken mask and how to defeat Lucreto.

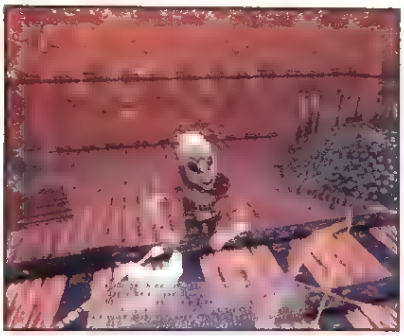
http://pc.ign.com

nity

it's not up to the high standards we've come to expect from Williams.

Take the story, for instance - or what little there is of one. As the game opens, you see a mysterious figure cast a spell on a golden mask, shattering it into pieces. One of the pieces lands at the feet of our hero Connor, who's chatting with his friend Sarah. Just as he picks it up, a black tempest rolls over Daventry, leaving everyone in the kingdom turned to stone - except for Connor. As he moves through the village, he meets a wizard who tells him that the only way to restore Daventry and its inhabitants is to recover the missing pieces of the mask.

It's a good start, but unfortunately that's pretty much all there is. Sure, Connor travels through a lot of different worlds (see sidebar) and gets to see a few clues as to the identity of the big bad guy, but there are no plot twists, flash backs, or expository scenes to make the experience or characters more interesting. And while the variety of game worlds provides an epic feel, the flow of events in each of them is almost identical. Connor arrives, learns from an inhabitant that the destruction of the Mask has screwed things up, figures out what has to be done to restore order and sets about doing it, then moves on to the next world and starts the process again.



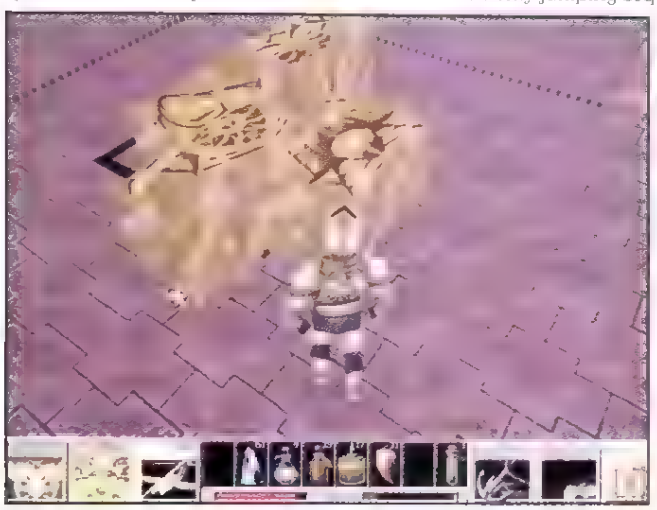
Near the start of each level, you'll encounter a character who'll give you a mission.

Though you'll meet all sorts of characters as you seek out the pieces of the Mask, none of them have any memorable qualities; in fact, they feel like little more than talking heads placed in your path as a convenient way of telling you what you need to do or where an important object is located. The only characters that stand out at all are a girl lost in the Dimension of Death and a unicorn in Daventry that's been transformed into an ugly beast by the tempest - and it's possible to complete the game without even meeting them.

And the biggest changes — in the new viewpoints and the heavy emphasis on combat - also aren't quite as polished as you'd expect. To be blunt, combat is little more than drudgery: most encounters consist of walking up to a baddy and clicking madly with the weapon icon until he falls to the ground. Faced with an end level monster? Not to worry - it just takes more mouse clicks to defeat (oh, and you might need to use a restorative potion or crystal to restore your health meter during battle). Why include combat - and so much of it, at least on the Normal setting - if it's not challenging or fun?

For the most part, the new perspectives work well once you get used to their quirks, but there's still some weirdness going on here. Play from the first person perspective, for example, and you'll discover you can use the mouse only to look up or down. The mouse is more useful in the third-person viewpoint — you can zoom and pan in order to see enemies or objects hidden behind walls, as well as look up and down - but playing from this perspective is still something of a pat-your-head-while-rubbing-your-tummy affair.

Even after you find the point of view that suits you best, you're still likely to run into frustration when it comes time for the tricky jumping sequences. Because the keyboard is used for directional control instead of the mouse, it's nearly impossible to get Connor lined up exactly the way you want him to, and even after hours of play, it's still tough to tell just where he'll land. I died countless times misjudging distances — so much, in fact, that I found myself pounding my desk in anger and wondering why these sequences were in the game in the first place.



After working your way through seven perilous regions and hordes of enemies, *Mask of Eternity* rewards you with... a sliding puzzle you must solve from an inefficient third-person point of view.

Outweighing these rough edges, though, is a huge slew of puzzles. Most are traditional "find object A to use on object B" fare, but you'll also encounter machine-based puzzles and some very subtle pattern-recognition problems that will challenge even veteran adventurers. Even without well-developed characters with which to interact, there's plenty to do in *Mask of Eternity* — and thankfully, the interface has been designed so you've got a pretty good idea what to do next and a general notion of how to go about it.

Take time to search out all the enemies in Daventry; the more you slay, the faster your experience level rises.

But there's one flaw in *Mask of Eternity* that's nearly inexcusable: the longest load times I've ever seen in a game. Loading games from within the same level is bad enough — somewhere around 45 seconds - but it can take up to *three and a half minutes* to load a new level. If you have to return to a previous world to retrieve an object — something which happened to me on several occasions - you're looking at up to seven minutes of down time before you can get back to your quest. I won't go into the reasons for the long load times except to say they're the result of Sierra's desire to save hard-drive space; personally, I'd gladly give up a gigabyte or more if it would let me get on with the business at hand.

There's no question that *Mask of Eternity* has plenty to offer adventure gaming fans, but this is a case where too much attention was paid to technology and not enough to the concepts that attract people to adventure games in the first place. You'll likely get your money's worth out of *Mask of Eternity*, but whether or not you'll ever think about it again after you've finished it is debatable — and that's *not* the mark of a great game.

Steve Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

66%

HIGHS: Good scenery graphics; excellent puzzle variety; large world.

LOWS: Too much combat and not enough plot development; shamefully long load times; NPCs are just talking heads.

BOTTOM LINE: A fun game, but improving the interface and story would make it so much better.

The Settlers III

CATEGORY Real-time strategy DEVELOPER Blue Byte Software PUBLISHER Blue Byte Software, (512) 343 0500, *www.bluebyte.com* REQUIRED P100, 32MB RAM, Mouse, 2MB graphic card; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive WE RECOMMEND P166, Modem; 250MB free hard-drive space MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS Serial/null modem No, Modem: No modem-to-modem play; IPX Yes, TCP/IP: Yes, Maximum players 10, Spawnable No, Free Internet service: Yes

The Settlers series comes of age with a much improved look and feel.

Way back in 1993, Blue Byte's *The Settlers* was one of the first games to offer real-time strategy — albeit at a very slow pace. Five years on, *The Settlers III* (*S3*) has picked up the pace, spiffed up the graphics, and gone multi-player, while maintaining its focus on the settlers and their need to build a civilization.

The game follows the standard, gather-resources A-and-B-to-manufacture-C philosophy. The Farmer supplies the Mill which gives the Bakery flour to feed the miners, etc.... And like all good real time strategy games, you send out soldiers and take over territory to win.

S3 does all this in its own sweet time. To get the good stuff like weapons, you need to build a series of support structures — Mines, Sawmills, Smelting Plants, and the like, which at times seem to take forever (oh, for a time-accelerator button). Luckily, since you spend a lot of time just looking at the game, the graphics have been dramatically improved. Gone are the flat, loin-cloth draped, Flintstone-looking men scurrying about. It's all gone 3D, baby! The attention to graphic and animation detail sets a new standard and will certainly help you pass the time while you're waiting for something to happen.

Settlers and *Settlers II* concentrated so narrowly on building a city, they seemed more like *SimCity* than a strategy game. In *S3*, an obvious effort was made to change that with two major enhancements. First, *S3* has finally added new military units. Archers, spear-throwers, and war engines can now be employed as well as the standard *Settlers* swordsmen. And unlike previous *Settlers*, you can do more than influence where they go — you can take control of them *Command & Conquer* style to better coordinate an attack.

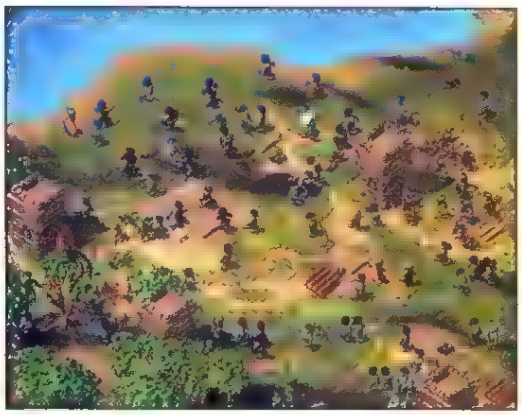
Second, in previous *Settlers* games, moving a resource required a bucket-brigade of workers to pass goods along a path that you also had to outline. It was a real drag, causing the game to develop very slowly. Now, a worker simply knows where to carry goods. *S3* has also gone multi-player, adding a greater sense of urgency than in the campaigns or single missions. Blue Byte even has its own free service where you can meet other players. One welcome feature has the computer take over if your opponent drops or bails on you during a game.

You can play as any of three races, Romans, Egyptians, and Asians, and each race has their own unique graphics. The main differences between them lie in the balance of resources required to construct their respective buildings and which god they worship — Jupiter for the Romans, Ch'ih-Yu for the Asians, and Horus for the Egyptians.

The gods take on a significant role. Booze from the Distillery can be turned into mana at a Temple. Mana can then be used by Priests to cause all kinds of *Populous* inspired, god-like events such as fires and floods (oh, the power of booze!).

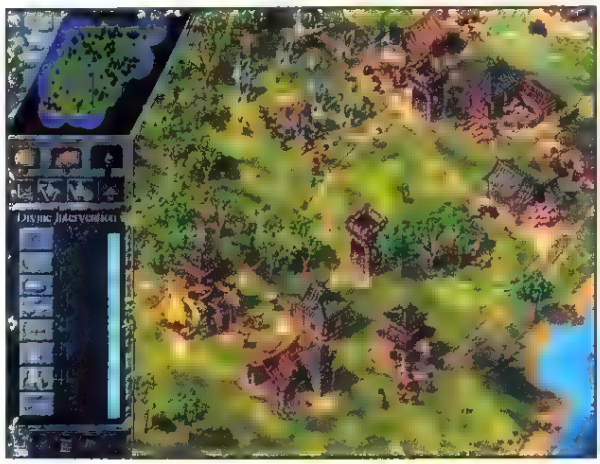
It takes a lot of buildings to get to the mana point. Each race has more than 30 types of buildings to construct and it seems you need almost all of them, since they're all inter-dependent. Ultimately, how well (and quickly) you put them all together will decide the outcome, and probably your enjoyment, of the game. If it's *C&C* or *WarCraft* you're looking for, you won't find it here. Even with the pace sped up over previous *Settlers*, it remains a much less hurried experience. But for strategy gamers who have grown weary of the increasingly intense pace of today's RTS experience, this slower pace could be just the ticket — it strikes a nice balance between the action oriented mainstream titles and more thoughtful fare like *Caesar III*, and as such it's a welcome addition to the genre.

Joe Novicki



Once your soldiers have claimed their victory, enemy workers will panic with no place to go and continue doing so until you exit the screen.

Behold the mighty Gods. As the storyline unfolds, you discover these guys have been partying way too long, with bad results.



The 3D-modeled characters and buildings display a meticulous attention to detail, as seen in the pagoda-style architecture of this Asian settlement. Graphics are much improved over previous games.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

85%

HIGHS: Sharp new graphics and animations; diverse inter-dependent settlements.

LOWS: Control over workers and soldiers is not great; gets tedious waiting for goods to produce.

BOTTOM LINE: There's enough to watch and build to keep a real-time strategy fan amused.

http://pc-gn.com

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TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter

CATEGORY Sports DEVELOPER DreamForge Intertainment, Inc. PUBLISHER ASC Games, (800) 474-7595, *www.ascgames.com* REQUIRED Windows 95 or better; Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, 2MB DirectX video card WE RECOMMEND Pentium II; 64MB RAM, 3Dfx card, DirectX sound card MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS None

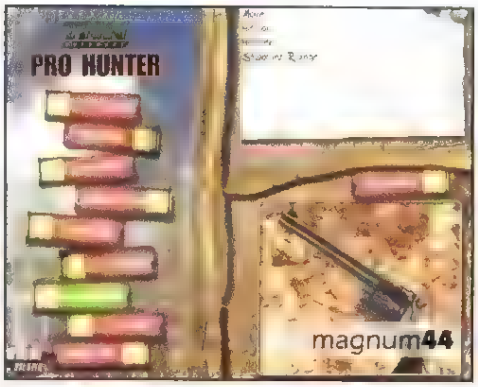
This is the best hunting game yet — but that's not saying much.

Maybe GT Interactive shouldn't have licensed the *Unreal* engine. So far, the games built on it — *Klingon Honor Guard*, and now *TNN Outdoors* — haven't given *Unreal* nearly as flattering a legacy as *Quake*'s children have for it.

To be fair, *TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter* isn't a first-person shooter — it's the latest title in the overpopulated hunting genre. *TNN* lets you hunt a plethora of animals, including deer, elk, rabbits, squirrels, ducks, and other wood and beasties, and you get myriad guns, bows, scents, decoys, and other goodies to ensure your technological edge against these dangerous enemies.

A few things set this game above the other hunting games flooding the shelves at your local Wal Mart. For one, much of the world is truly 3D, thanks to the overqualified *Unreal* engine. You hunt in wide areas under tall cliffs, and the scenery is actually pretty impressive — except for the trees. Not only are they poorly drawn, flat sprites, but due to a bizarre rendering bug, they actually seem to move in relation to you as you hunt.

Hunting big game works pretty well, but small game presents a problem. While running the game at 640x480 resolution, the few pixels that make up distant ducks, squirrels, and other little critters often get lost under the crosshairs of your scope! There's no good way to shoot these creatures: it's hard to get close to them, and it's even harder to hit small targets without a scope (a problem in itself, since you ought to be hunting these little guys with a shotgun, and you wouldn't have a scope on that).



You can hunt with an assortment of real pistols and rifles, and you can also bring along extra gear like gloves and Skunk Scent. Dogs can also come along.

There, under the tree! The Small Game Tournament gives you a limited number of rounds to kill as many of each creature as you can — if you can spot the little pixelated animals, that is.

Speaking of the game's resolution I use 640x480 as an example, because that's the best I can do and keep the game playable on my 300MHz Pentium II with a Voodoo2 card and 64MB of RAM. This game doesn't use the lighting effects that *Unreal* does; the trees are all flat sprites, the creatures are made of a handful of polygons each, and they barely move — and yet *TNN Outdoors* is choppy even at 640x480. Now, I can play *Unreal* on that same machine at 800x600, and it's *smooth*. I don't know how DreamForge managed to slow the *Unreal* engine down with so little going on in the game, but it's definitely struggling.

You're allowed to bring a beagle or a Brittany with you on your hunt, but I have no idea if there's a benefit to bringing a beagle. I took each breed on several hunts, and the Brittany was helpful in tracking big game after I wounded them. The beagle did manage to chase rabbits, but a few times it ran away, never to return. Though several attractant and masking scents are offered, there doesn't seem to be a way to gauge wind direction — none that I could find, anyway.

Another annoying bug rendered the big game tournament useless: When hunting, you have the option to ask for expert help when targeting an animal. It consists of a whispering voiceover that comments on the size of the game (in fact, this is the only reasonable way to tell how big a target is from a distance). The first stage of the big game tourney is turkey hunting. I've bagged tom after tom, and even when the "expert" enthusiastically described it as a "good-sized bird," it wouldn't be big enough to qualify for the next round. That's okay, though — it's that much less time I have to spend playing this game.

At the moment, hunting games still seem to sell well, regardless of quality and since their primary customers aren't hard-core gamers, this review probably won't stop *TNN Outdoors* from raking in the dough. But if we save only one reader $30, it's all worth it.

Joel Durham Jr.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

67%

HIGHS: This is the best hunting sim yet...

LOWS: ...but that's not saying much. It's choppy, unrealistic, and no fun.

BOTTOM LINE: If you want the thrill of hunting, get a license, grab your 16-gauge, and go stand in a field somewhere.

http://pc.ign.com

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Speed Busters

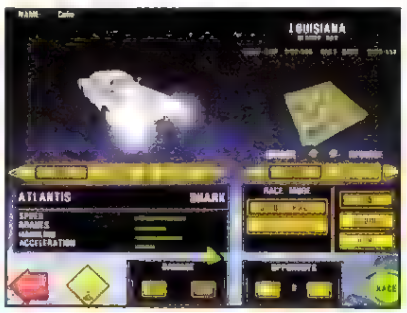
CATEGORY Racing DEVELOPER Ubi Soft Canada PUBLISHER Ubi Soft Entertainment, (800) 824-7638, *www.ubisoft.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Quad-speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator (Direct3D compatible WE RECOMMEND Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, Supported sound card; Gamepad MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS Six players over Modem, IPX; Internet — game service provided

With awesome graphics and out-of-control gameplay, *Speed Busters* is one hoot of a racer.

Although realism freaks will always opt for the supernaturally realistic driving models of Papyrus' auto sims, there's something to be said about a damn good arcade racing game. Games like *Super GT*, *Harley Davidson's LA Riders*, and *Daytona 2* haven't made their ways to the PC yet, but Ubi Soft has delivered something that can hold its own against the quarter munchers in the arcade.

Speed Busters opens with a video sequence that's cool in a goofy, Mentos-commercial kind of way. A police officer has won the lottery, gone mental, and now gives speeders cash rewards instead of tickets. Despite the obvious legal implications for the police department, this provides an excuse for people to drive really fast on back country roads without having to worry about the law.

That premise probably tipped you off, but for the record: *Speed Busters* isn't a realistic driving sim by any means. It puts huge emphasis on the feeling of being completely out of control. Racing in *Speed Busters* is fast and furious, with loopy jumps, spectacular crashes, and spinouts galore. You've got a near-unlimited number of nitro boosts that send you hurtling madly down the road; and every track is populated with wacky obstacles — the track set in Hollywood features a giant ape smashing his fists onto the roadway, a man eating shark taking a huge chunk out of the wooden bridge you're driving on, and an enormous dinosaur dragging a flaming car across the street. Most of this stuff changes as you complete each lap — you might not see the giant, *Indiana Jones*-style rolling boulder bearing down on your car until the final, crucial lap.



Break all kinds of laws on the Louisiana roadway. Just watch out for the gators!

There's also a touch of *Destruction Derby* mayhem thrown in for good effect, as each car takes visual damage. Plowing into an opponent's rear may tear his trunk open or smash out his rear window. It's all enormously entertaining, but you've got to keep your eye on your damage meter — once it hits 0 percent, it's game over.

The *Speed Busters* recipe also includes the best feature of Atari's *San Francisco Rush*: secret, hidden shortcuts! If you're feeling particularly spunky, you can forge your own track off the beaten path at several spots in the game, taking a flying leap on to moving trains or riverboats or across rope bridges. While they're not quite as cool as *Rush*'s rooftop jumps, they certainly provide an extra boost to put you in the lead. Still, the game could have used an "abort" button to mash when the player flies off a cliff to his certain doom or gets wedged into a 90-degree corner.

Rampaging T-Rexes and man-eating sharks are two big hazards you'll face on the Hollywood track. Most of the stuff you see on the track changes with each loop.

Aside from the expected Arcade and Time Attack modes, there's an additional Championship mode, in which police officers with radar guns are spread out over each track. Depending on how fast you blast by each of them, you'll get oodles of cash to spend on new cars, nitro boosts, and other cool car customizations. There are no officially-licensed, real-world cars, but *Speed Busters*' garage features some extremely cool 1950s era muscle car lookalikes. Even better are the multiple "skins" available, from hippy-trippy rainbow designs to paintjobs right out of Red China.

The game's development team cites Sega's *Super GT* as an influence — and boy, does it show. *Speed Busters* just manages to edge out *Need for Speed III* in terms of graphics — the cars are reflection mapped, with headlights and brake lights providing those funky *Unreal*-style light coronas. The tracks look just as good, having real depth to them, and textures aren't overused as in *Test Drive 5*. Best of all, on a high-end system, there is *no* draw-in whatsoever. This game really looks fantastic.

The only problems lie with the game's physics — they're good, but not great. The cars seem a little too heavy, and the friction seems a bit off when your vehicle manages to flip over. And it'd be nice to have more than six tracks (plus one hidden roadway), although the option to play each course backwards adds some variety. I also couldn't get the game to recognize my Act Labs RS racing wheel, so you might have a few problems getting analog controls to work.

If you're looking for staunch realism, look elsewhere. But if you're in the mood for a fast-paced arcade racer with a hell of a lot of speed, we reckon *Speed Busters*'ll do you good.

Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fantastic visuals; relentless speed; out-of-control and fun gameplay.

85%

LOWS: Physics need a little work; some controller configuration problems.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the best pure arcade-style racing games for the PC.

http://pc.ign.com

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is here.

Tom Clancy's ruthless.com

CATEGORY Strategy DEVELOPER Red Storm Entertainment PUBLISHER Red Storm Entertainment (919) 460 1776 www.redstorm.com REQUIRED Windows 95 Quad-speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 120, 16MB RAM WE RECOMMEND Pentium 200, 32MB RAM MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS TCP/IP (2-6 players)

In this cutthroat game of Big Business, greed really *is* good. So is fire-bombing your rivals' headquarters.

Next-day-rich dotcom start-up ruthless.com. Yes, just like with the CEO of every software company you've ever heard of, your software isn't specific—everything your company makes is simply called Product(). Your goal is to claw your way to the top of the corporate heap by any means at your disposal.

When you first see the main screen of ruthless.com, it looks like some sort of *Monopoly*-style buildings scattered around—you may well think, "Oh no, not another boardgame conversion!" No, to worry, though, this game's light years ahead of Red Storm's own *Politika* in every department. Yes, the simplicity of the main screen is deceptive—underneath it lies an engine that's complex, powerful, and subtle.

Each tile on the grid represents a single share of the abstract Market. Each player is color-coded. Your buildings control the tiles in their immediate vicinity. You can build as many as nine departments on each floor, with eight types (Research and Development, Marketing, Legal, Admin, Stock, etc.). Each department is represented as a floor within its building.

At your disposal are three commodities: Cash, Computer Points, and Legal Points. The larger the market share you control, the more points you have to work with. Cash, of course, is required to hire (and keep) new Executives (and to bribe or corrupt Executives from rival companies).

Computer Points are required for both offensive and defensive actions. If you want to prevent other corporations from hacking into your system, you'll need to build firewalls and virus shields. The geeks in your Computer Core department love nothing more than to launch a Data Run (hacking attack) against specific Departments in other corporations' buildings. They can penetrate the enemy's mainframes and plant data bombs that close the target department for two turns.

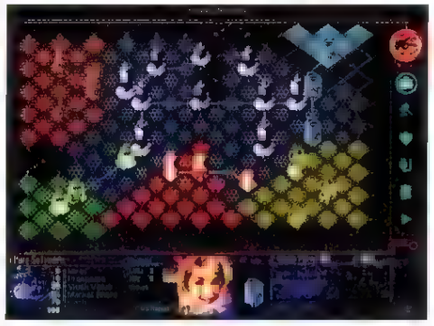
And lawyers! How could any corporation thrive without pit bull attorneys to file frivolous suits, defend patents, and hush up scandals? Beware of investing too many points in your Legal Dept., however, because—as we all know—lawyers beget *more* lawyers, and you might find your company afflicted with Lawyer Bloat. If more than half the corporations in the game contract Lawyer Bloat, the Justice Department may step in—and it's incredibly expensive to get them off your back (just ask Bill Gates).

While *ruthless.com* does embody real business principles and economic models, most of the fun comes from treachery, wheeling and dealing, and sabotaging your rivals. You can create scandals, implement black bag jobs to steal ideas or data, bribe or blackmail—or you can *really* embrace the Dark Side by fire-bombing a corporation's buildings, leaving one of its Executives whacked.

There are six scenarios, each of them radically different from the others. My favorite is the one called Take Down Evilsoft. To oppose this juggernaut (a corporation that looks and acts suspiciously like Microsoft), you must form an uneasy alliance with the other small companies on the board. Once you've humbled Evilsoft, however, that alliance will crumble rapidly, and it's dog eat dog again.

An experienced player can finish any of the scenarios in about an hour, so the game is well suited to gamers with busy schedules. The tightness of focus also gives an extra kick to online games. And if you're playing solo against the computer, you can adjust the AI's playing style from "passive" to "aggressive." Red Storm promises that the AI doesn't cheat—it knows only what a comparable human player would know, and it has no advantage in cash or resources, regardless of which scenario you're playing or what difficulty level you've selected.

The game's Campaign mode resembles a single scenario with no time limit. You lose if your corporation is destroyed; you win if you capture 75 percent of the market.



The abstract strategy of *ruthless.com* doesn't really call for flashy graphics, still, it looks pretty good.

Ever want to sock it to Bill Gates? Play the "Taking down Evilsoft" scenario and have at it.

I like the look of the game: lurid corporate colors and mind-concept images for the Executives. Overall, the graphics generate an appropriately dark and sinister mood.

The manual is okay, but the tutorial is skimpy indeed—it walks you through a couple of early game turns, shows you how to recruit Executives and how to use the Quality rating of your generic Products (the higher the Quality rating, the more income you receive from every one you control), but that's all. The already steep learning curve would have been significantly lessened if the tutorial also showed you how to perform some of the trickier operations, like acquiring neutral start-up companies or creating a scandal.

You'll figure it out in time, however, because the interface is remarkably clean for a game of such complexity. When the gameplay gets hot and the skullduggery factor kicks in, you'll have a grand time pretending you're Donald Trump or Ted Turner. While the AI certainly gives you a decent contest, the game blossoms when you play it online against other real-life tycoons. Think of the devious ways you can tickle with glee as you plant a data bomb in an opponent's Computer Core! Gnash your teeth when an opponent outfoxes you for a valuable start-up company, then ruins you in frivolous lawsuits!

Ruthless.com lives up to its name. It's a remarkably subtle game that throws a number of new ideas at you (too many, in fact, for other Internet games on the market).

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Be as unethical and treacherous as you please.

LOWS: Feeble tutorial and steep learning curve make it seem more complicated than it is.

BOTTOM LINE: It all adds up to good, wicked, fun; there's certainly no other business sim remotely like it.

85%

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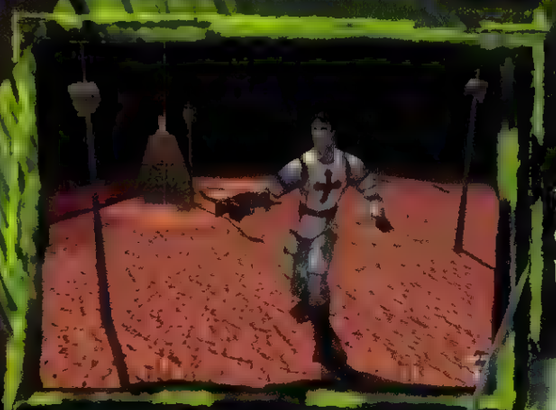

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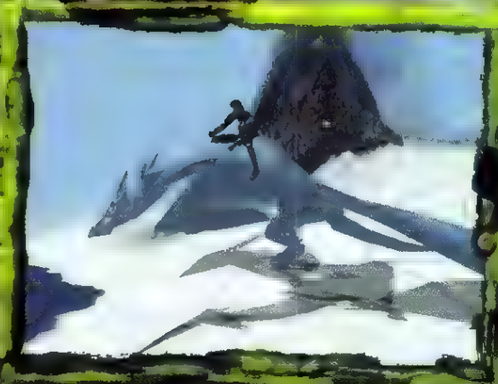

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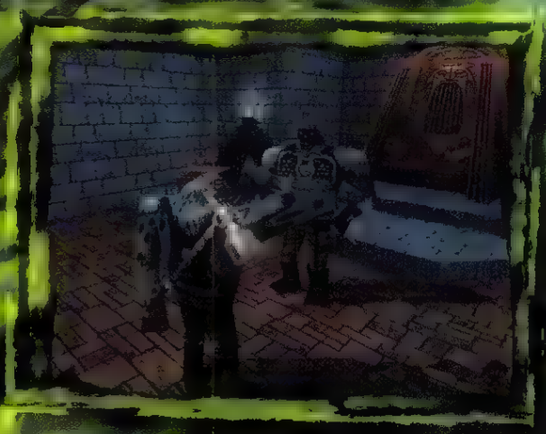

TEEN T AGES 13 CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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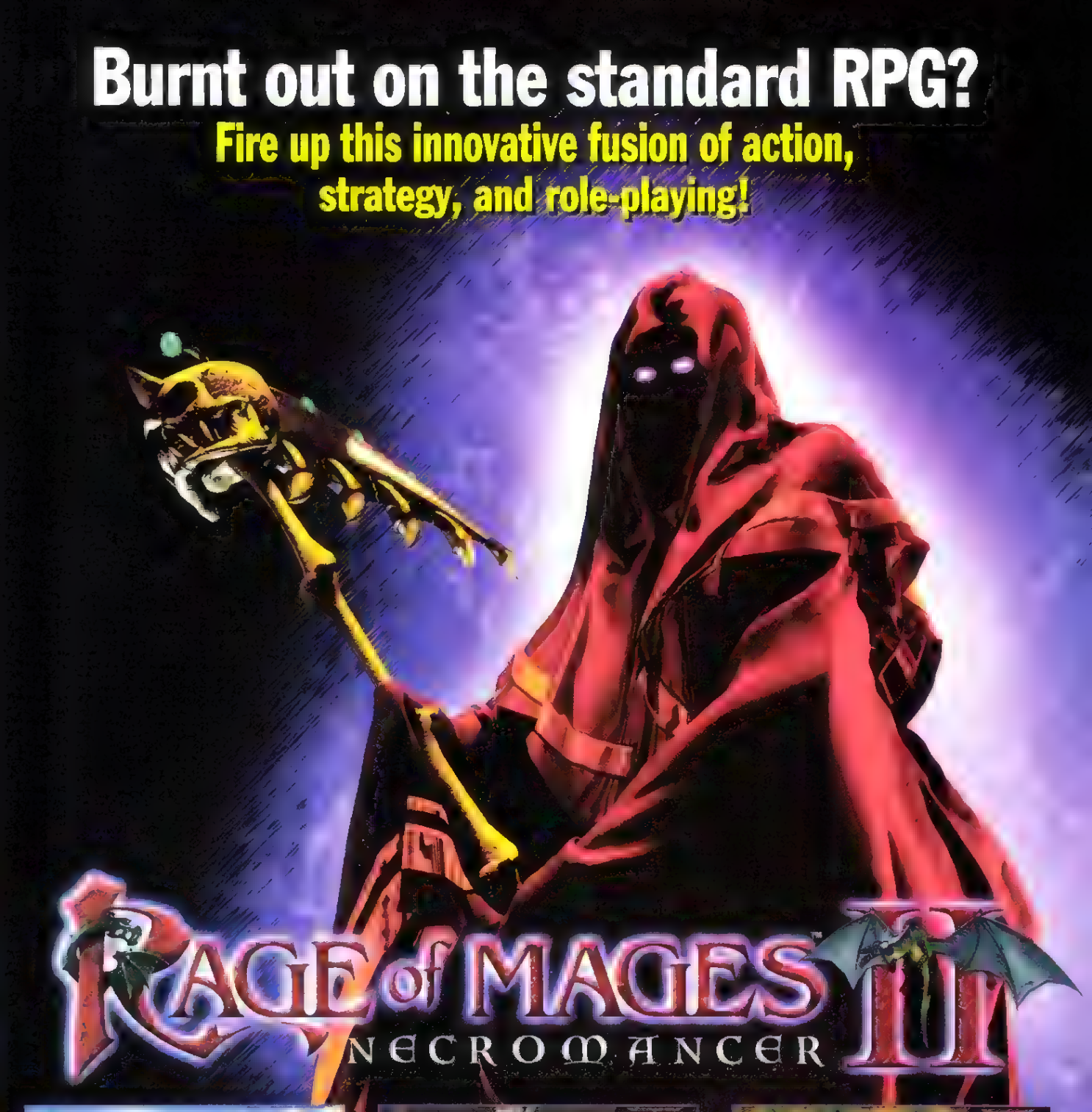

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Return to Krondor

CATEGORY Role-playing DEVELOPER Pyrotechnix PUBLISHER Sierra, (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Quad-speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 166, 24MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 2MB video card, DirectSound compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND Pentium II 200 or higher; 32MB RAM MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS None

It might be too short and a bit too linear, but *Return to Krondor* has a lot to offer any RPG fan.

Mysteriously, when *Betrayal at Krondor* first appeared on store shelves, gamers hardly paid attention. Hoping to salvage some sales, Sierra decided to switch the game from its original multiple floppy disk format to a CD version — and sales skyrocketed. Unfortunately, Sierra had already terminated its contract with Raymond E. Feist, the fantasy novelist behind the world of Midkemia where the game was based, and he'd already taken his license to other vendors. He eventually settled on 7th Level, and work started on the next game. 7th Level then took a nosedive, and it was time to shop the license around again. Sierra quickly offered the best deal after its huge success with the original title, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Return to Krondor is a vastly different game from its award-winning predecessor. The story takes place several years after the events in *Betrayal*. However, you still get to play some of the same characters — the lovable Squire James, for instance, is a nearly constant companion. It's James you initially control on his errand to meet the new court mage Jazhara and lead her back to the palace as the game opens. After meeting her, the intrigue begins. Before you know it, your party's embroiled in a plot to recover an ancient artifact of the Ishapian priesthood, and your enemies range from brigands to demons to the undead. The game unfolds over 11 chapters, the first several taking place solely in the city of Krondor. The development team worked closely with Feist to make sure that the game follows in the tradition of the Midkemia novels, and it shows throughout — the story is engrossing, and contains lots of interesting plot twists to keep players on their toes. As far as voice acting goes, the main characters are pretty good, but it's obvious the budget had run out by the time it came to do voices for the secondary characters.

Not all the enemies you encounter are of human nature. And the clipping isn't always perfect, either.

Rather than the first person view of *Betrayal*, *Return to Krondor* offers a third-person perspective, with the camera angle shifting around depending on your characters' location. This can make things pretty disorienting, especially when trying to navigate a larger, cluttered area. Sometimes players have the option to cycle through different camera angles and choose the one they like best, but that option is usually only available during combat. The system makes movement with the mouse tricky, which means most players will likely use the keyboard commands instead. Another visual curiosity: While the game features 3D acceleration, it actually looks and plays better *without* the acceleration turned on. Because the backgrounds are pre-rendered, you actually get more lighting effects and color differences using the software renderer. Bizarre.

The characters have tons of stats to play with, from Brawling to Shield skills, and as they gain experience, they reach new levels. Once a new level is reached, players have 100 skill points to

During combat, you often have multiple views of the action. All three of these shots are from the same battle at the same moment.

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distribute as they wish over a variety of skills, including magic. How the points are allocated determines the growth of the character. For the most part, the system works well, although it becomes pretty obvious which areas should be boosted and which ones are a waste of points, and there isn't a whole lot of variety — you're stuck with the classes the game gives you.

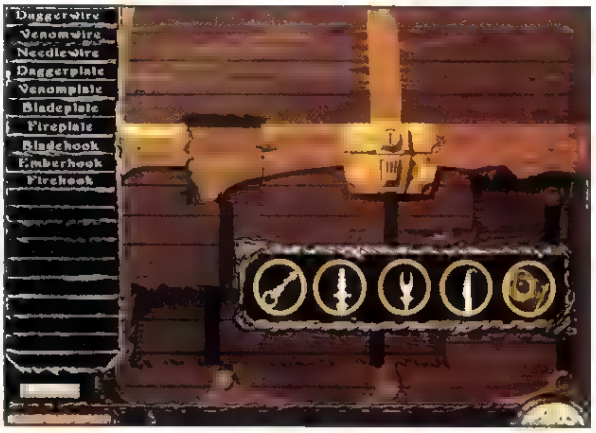
Combat is turn based, and works very well. As each character takes his or her turn, you have plenty of time to decide what your move should be. You can access your inventory, move, defend, and attack in a variety of styles. Aggressive does a lot of damage, but leaves you essentially defenseless. Conservative doesn't do as much damage but keeps you protected from counter-attacks, and Balanced is a good, erm, balance, between the two. Alternately, you can chose not to attack and guard, defend, or use an inventory item instead. No matter what your choice is, though, it's simple to execute. Annoyingly, the game doesn't give you an easy way to reload a previous save game during combat if the fight isn't going your way — you have to either play the fight through to the end, or quit out to Windows. Also, there's no way to retreat from combat — once you start fighting, it's a battle to the death.

One of the more interesting changes from *Betrayal* is the magic system. There are six paths of magic: Fire, Mind, Change, Storms, Life, and Divine. Each path contains ten possible spells, and your skill level in that path determines those available to your magic user. For every ten points in a given skill, you get one more spell. You can either Quick Cast a spell — cast it in one round — or you can Slow Cast it over a period of two rounds. The Slow Cast method guarantees success, but leaves you vulnerable to attack, and if your magic user is attacked while preparing the spell, it will fizzle. The selection of spells is nicely varied, from defensive to offensive abilities. Many players will want to focus on one or two paths, however — Fire and Storms are the most devastating to your enemies. Along with the spells in the paths, you can also find scrolls that will give you access to more powerful spells that you might not ordinarily be able to cast. However, you still have to have some sort of proficiency in the class of the scroll — non-magic users can't use magical scrolls.

The inventory system gets to be a bit clunky after you gather up lots of goodies.

As your characters progress in magical ability, they have access to more powerful spells.

Not all of your tasks involve the sword, like rescuing trapped orphans inside this burning building.



The lock-picking system is unique in *Return to Krondor*, requiring skill on the part of the character *and* the player.

Return to Krondor also takes a unique approach to opening locked chests. Rather than use the riddles of *Betrayal at Krondor*, you have to open the chests by applying appropriate lockpicking tools. To disarm traps, you first have to scope the mechanism, then choose the right tool for the job — ratchet, cutters, or lever. Successfully disarming traps is a combination of player skill and the skill of the character. If clicking the mouse at the right moment is not your bag, you can also choose to let the computer use a dice roll and James' skill to determine success or failure. This method of opening treasure chests feels much more natural in the game environment, and makes the chests a fun part of the game, rather than a tedious exercise to get at the contents.

The game's biggest drawback is its length — it's just too darn short. The 11 chapters fly by very quickly, and though some might want to play through a second time to try to discover new things, there's really not much point — the game won't let you deviate from the story no matter how hard you try. But if you're looking for something none too taxing to play for just a couple of weeks (about as long as it would take the casual gamer to finish), or if you're a fan of the Feist novels, this will keep you amused.

Michael Wolf

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Exciting story line; lots of items, spells, weapons, potions; great combat system.

LOWS: Too short; camera angles make it difficult to navigate; inventory management gets tedious.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're looking for a fun, quick, RPG with a good story, this is one to get.

WWII Fighters

CATEGORY Simulation DEVELOPER Jane's Combat Simulations PUBLISHER Jane's Combat Simulations, (800) 245-4525 www.janes.ea.com REQUIRED Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space 3D accelerator (3Dfx or Direct3D-compatible) WE RECOMMEND Eight speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard-drive space, joystick, throttle, and rudder controls MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS Serial, Modem 28.8, IPX (2-8 players), TCP/IP (2-8 players); Maximum players 8; Spawnable, Free Internet Service. www.janescombat.net Split Screen/Hotseat. No

Don't hate it because it's beautiful; Jane's foray into World War Two is lovely, but flawed.

Of the three major World War Two air combat simulations released as we go to press, Jane's *WWII Fighters* was the one we expected to be the hands-down winner. MicroProse had taken too long with *European Air War*, and Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator* was an unknown quantity, since the software giant had never tackled air combat. It's ironic, then, that both of those sims wind up being superior to *WWII Fighters* in several areas.

We've come to expect one of two kinds of sim from Jane's Combat Simulations: either the brick heavy boxes and authenticity of *Longbow 2* or *F-15* (developed by Andy Hollis's teams in Austin and Maryland) or the hop-in-and blow-stuff up fun of *U.S. Navy Fighters* or *Advanced Tactical Fighters* (from Paul Grace's team in San Mateo, CA). Since the box for *WWII Fighters* lacks that impressive heft (the manual is a wispy-thin and woefully insufficient 90 pages) and the production was managed by Paul Grace, it was fair to expect a less realistic sim. That's what *WWII Fighters* is, but it would be unfair to say that's *all* it is. It's certainly a step up in the realism department from its predecessors, while maintaining their accessibility and flexibility of play through difficulty settings, quick mission creation, and pop-up windows. The result is a game that tries to please the entire gamut of simulation fans, from the yank-and-bankers looking for *Doom* with wings to the flight junkies who aren't happy with anything less than hyper realistic modeling of the most academic flight issues. It doesn't precisely succeed at this goal of being all things to all people, but it does a decent job trying.

***WWII Fighters* excels at damage modeling during the dogfighting. Bits of metal fly off the plane, wings crack, and cockpit glass hazes over as it shatters.**

From the first screens, you know you're in for some class-A production values. The main menu interface is set up like a virtual museum of WWII flight history. You can walk around the different locations and view exhibits related to the planes, read the history of the air war in Europe, and play authentic period combat footage, all against a swing music background. Detailed descriptions, specifications, and interactive models of each of the seven flyable aircraft in the game are accompanied by an option to drop into the cockpit of each for a quick test flight. It's a well crafted interface that turns the game into part reference title, part simulation. More game elements can be found in another area of the museum, including multi-player options, single missions, campaigns, and custom and quick missions. It's all very creative and handsome, but also a little impractical and cumbersome, since it increases the number of mouse clicks needed to get you in the air. I want to load up the game and start flying, not wander around a virtual museum every time I play.

The jet-powered Me 262 is a perennial favorite. It could fly circles around the enemy, but it was also delicate and hard to handle.

Once you do find where the action is, you have plenty of choices that will be familiar to pilots who've played other Jane's games. The quick mission lets you create a simple encounter by adjusting settings such as aircraft types, AI level, time of day, and advantage, while the mission builder allows for more complex editing of missions, including flight com-

Explosion effects are one of *WWII Fighters*' real strengths. They don't look like pixel parties; they look like fireballs and burned wreckage

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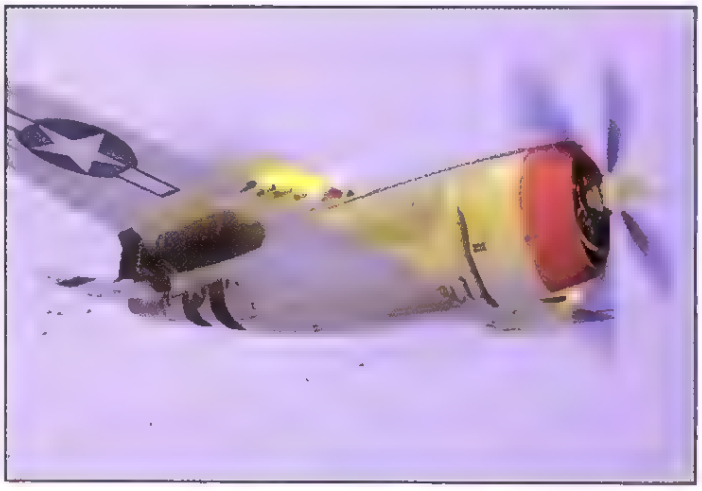


You can actually see empty shell casings ejected as you fire your guns.

position, primary targets, and event triggers. There are 35 single missions altogether (20 Allied and 15 Axis), plus seven training scenarios for each side and the ability to play custom missions created with the editor. The missions and campaign are largely rooted in 1944 and center on the airborne portion of the Battle of the Bulge. The campaign itself is a disappointment, since it's merely a string of single, historically based missions with little room for pilot development and dynamic features.

Missions feel a bit hardwired, lacking the seat-of-your-pants, epic scope of *European Air War*. Despite some impressive visual flourishes, the structures of the missions themselves are merely adequate. They never convey the feeling that you're in the middle of a constantly shifting battlefield; it's more a matter of hitting waypoints A, B, and C in the right order to solve a puzzle like mission requirement. Mission diversity is good, encompassing everything from straight dogfighting and fighter sweeps to huge bomber escorts and strikes, but since Jane's has shown us some truly detailed and dynamic battlefields in its hardcore sims, this seems like a step backward.

Flight modeling, the main point of interest for hardcore simmers, is better than expected, but not as good as it could be. There are seven flyable aircraft: the Bf 109G-6, FW 190A-8, ME 262A, P-38J Lightning, P-47D Thunderbolt, P-51D Mustang, and Spitfire F.IX. Planes are modeled in a fair level of detail and perform closer to the real thing than their counterparts in *ATF* or *Navy Fighters*, but this game won't be mistaken for *WarBirds*, *European Air War*, or even *Combat Flight Simulator*. The planes stall and spin, but recovery is far too easy. They continue to perform the same regardless of angle of attack, and don't bleed speed realistically. This wouldn't be as big an issue if Jane's didn't make some inflated claims for the realism of this sim; it's a high mid-range simulation with variable difficulty settings, but even on the hardest level it won't entirely satisfy hardcore air combat fans.

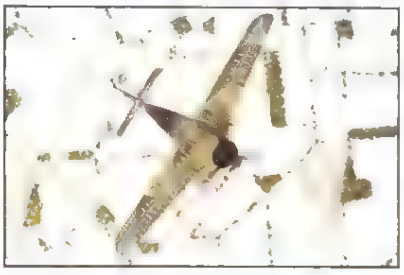
Sure, the bullet effects look sharp in this shot, but the bigger issue is an inverted climb with little performance decay, showing weaknesses in the flight modeling.

One thing Jane's did get right, however, is the damage modeling: Planes can be damaged in myriad ways, and the damage can be persistent and degrading. For instance, I hit the wing of a ME 262 and didn't seem to slow him down too badly — but when he went into a high-G maneuver, the wing ripped off and he was done for. Hard landings can crumble gears, blow-back from ground explosions can damage your plane or knock it out, and the wall of flak can be a persistent and tactically tricky element.

The effects this damage has on your aircraft's flight properties are represented graphically which brings us to *WWII Fighters* strongest point: visually, it's simply stunning. It's one of the most detailed, finely textured, and graphically realistic simulations ever created. Damage comes in many forms, from the march of bullets along your fuselage to the splash of blood from a pilot who's been hit. Every element of object modeling is meticulous. Bullet hits and explosions look perfect. Smoke and clouds are translucent and three dimensional. Aircraft are recreated right down to the rivets, with faded nose art and the weathered, bruised look of machines that have seen some action. Cockpits are all detailed and fully 3D, and each one looks as good as you could ever hope for. Terrain isn't as detailed as in *Combat Flight Sim*, but it feels less flat, and objects like bridges and buildings are ably integrated. Possibly the most showstopping touches are the little critters who cut and run when you come in low: I spooked a deer from the woods on one strafing run, and a friend saw a German soldier jump out of his burning vehicle, take a few steps, and fall down dead. Talk about detail!

Plenty of viewing angles have been provided so you can see all this detail from just about any angle. In keeping with the *Navy Fighters* tradition, you can overlay windows on your cockpit view to keep target aircraft in sight at all times. A wide array of interior cockpit views creates a strong situational awareness. You can look pretty much anywhere, and the padlock view keeps designated targets in sight at all times. Some might consider the picture in picture approach to dogfighting a cheat that pushes *WWII Fighters* into the realm of arcade games. It's not mandatory, though, and I frankly found it a great feature that gives the game an almost cinematic feel.

WWII Fighters has not reached the shelves without its share of problems, however. It's an absolute hardware hog,



Terrain is a mixed bag. It lacks the detail of *Combat Flight Simulator*, but it's more diverse and has a much better sense of depth.

and if you want decent frame rates in full graphical detail, you'll need at least a Pentium 400 and tons of RAM. Load times are very long. The autopilot has problems; it'll occasionally fly you into the ground if you're not paying attention. And while the multiplayer matchmaking and direct TCP/IP support do provide smooth play for co-op or head to head missions when they work, there are times when they don't. Players time warp, show up doubled, and have some pretty nasty crashes when trying to do multiplayer. *Janescombat.net* was also down repeatedly when I did the testing for this review.

Visually, this is the uncontested winner in the WWII flight sim brawl, but in terms of flight models and mission depth, it falls short of *European Air War* and *Combat Flight Simulator*. Still, its user-friendly approach, high production values, and wide array of missions make it an entertaining game. It misses the mark it aims for (an all-encompassing sim to satisfy both novice and hardcore gamers); nevertheless, it's fun.

T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

84%

HIGHS: Visually stunning graphics and effects; plenty of missions types, flexibility, and planes.

LOWS: Canned missions and campaigns; fairly soft flight models; long load times; a few bugs.

BOTTOM LINE: The most accessible and visually sumptuous WWII game for the mid-range sim fan.

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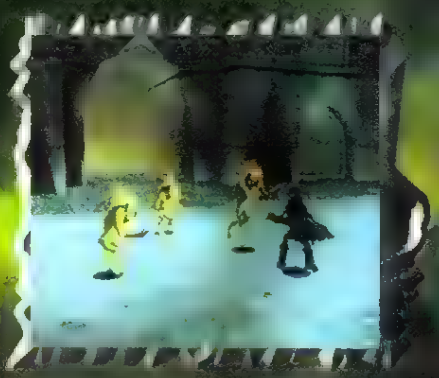

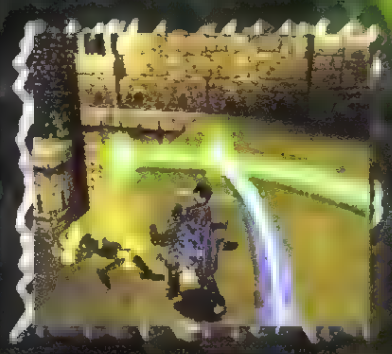

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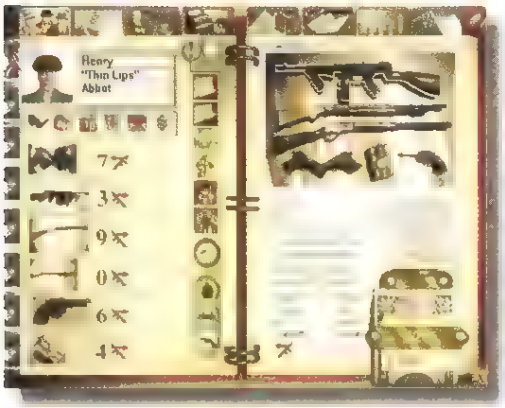

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Redguard

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY Action-Adventure DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-0700, *www.bethsoft.com*
REQUIRED Windows 95; Quad speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 166; 32MB RAM WE RECOMMEND 8x CD-ROM drive; Pentium 233; 3D accelerator (3Dfx-compatible), Supported sound card; Gamepad MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS None

Despite some significant flaws, the latest Elder Scrolls game is a rollicking good adventure.

Fans of Bethesda's Elder Scrolls roleplaying games were surprised to discover that the latest installment in the series wouldn't be an RPG at all. Instead, Bethesda decided to launch a new series, The Elder Scrolls Adventures, and kick off a line of action-oriented adventures set in the land of Hammerfell. The first game in the series is *Redguard*, and it's good, but can an action-adventure hybrid stack up to Bethesda's previous RPG offerings?

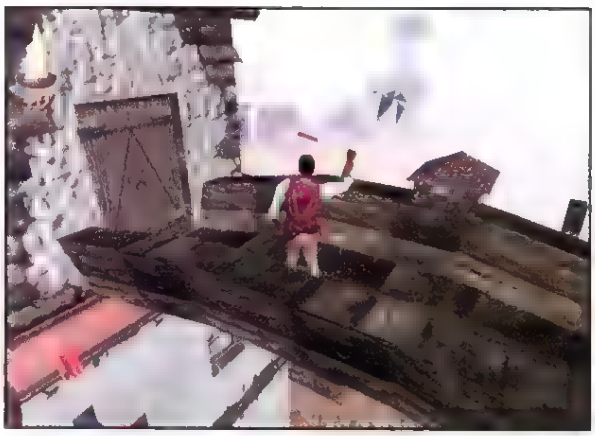
Redguard puts you in the boots of Cyrus, a Redguard mercenary returning to his homeland of Stros M'Kai after an extended leave of absence. His sister has disappeared, and further investigation reveals that she might have been part of a group of revolutionaries who dubbed themselves the Restless League. And after the porcine Governor Richton puts a price on our Redguard hero's head, it looks like all is not well in the Elder Scrolls universe.

The game limits itself to the Island of Stros M'Kai and a few surrounding islands and coves, but every square foot has been meticulously created in real-time 3D. The game's sprawling cityscapes are most impressive; colorful characters walk about, seagulls sail through the air, and dozens of shops and buildings beckon for your attention. In some ways, the world of *Redguard* is a bit overwhelming — the gaming world is so large, open, and populated, it's possible to wander for hours just enjoying the sights (and running from any angry guards you might encounter).

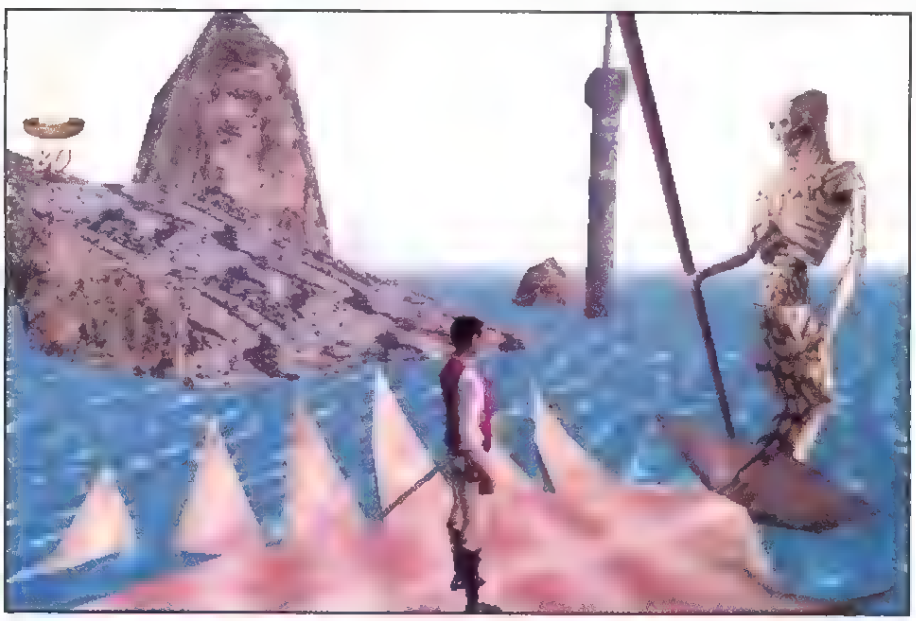
The game manages to keep the player on the right track via Cyrus's logbook — whenever you encounter a piece of critical information, Cyrus makes note of it in a journal that you can call up at any moment. You'll find this to be extremely useful when you start conversing with the townspeople and other characters who populate the game.

The character-interaction portion of *Redguard* really goes all the way — which may be a little *too* much for the casual gamer. Simply put, *Redguard* contains an obscene amount of speech, and pounding through the average Stros M'Kai citizen's dialog tree can take ten minutes on the average. Around 90 percent of the game's voice acting is pretty well done, but the remaining ten percent contains some voices that are slightly less pleasing to the ear than nails on a chalkboard. Ultimately, you may want to turn off the voice and simply read the subtitles to save time. And if you're really in a hurry, you can simply skip through everything, then read Cyrus's conversation summaries in his logbook; he'll write down anything important that you might have missed.

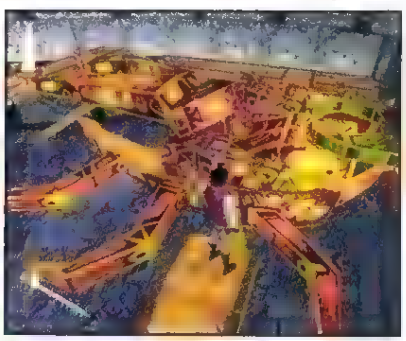
Of course, *Redguard* is much more than wandering around and talking to strangers. As soon as Cyrus heads down into a dungeon or finds his way to the Isle of N'Gasta (home to the living dead), the game shifts to a more action-packed style of gameplay, peppered with plenty of puzzles — sort of an intellectual rendition of *Tomb Raider*. Gallons of bubbling lava, metal spikes, and devious traps



It looks sorta silly, but waving this red flag from the guard tower will signal your friend to start ringing the bell across the harbor.



There are lots of interesting characters in *Redguard*, and if the boatman on the ferry to N'Gasta doesn't creep you out, nothing will. He isn't too talkative — just pay up, and he'll take you where you need to go.



What the heck is *this*? The riddle of the Scarab is one of the most mind-boggling puzzles we've seen to date.

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Cyrus sets foot on the island of Stros M'Kai. The world of *Redguard* is so huge, it can be difficult to know where to go next. Check your log book for clues as to how to proceed.

provide obstacles to avoid, while objects like runes and other odd artifacts provide a puzzle solving aspect. A noteworthy addition to the mix is the use of ropes. Cyrus can climb up and down them, swing on them, and make death defying leaps from them onto high platforms. It's part *Pitfall* and part *Prince of Persia*, and it's *all* good.

The puzzle content of *Redguard* is also noteworthy — this game is home to some of the most wonderfully infuriating brain thumpers I've ever encountered. Some of them involve making sense of discarded Dwarven technology or mixing magical doo-dads to create a desired effect. One puzzle involves a giant, transforming robotic scarab that's going to drive you absolutely batty — and there's a problem with "gremlin dialog" that will bring a smile to your face.

On the other hand, there's the aspect of combat. I spent plenty of time in the *Draggin' Tale*, Stros M'Kai's local bar/swordplay training course, but I never felt like I got a handle on the swashbuckling aspect of things. Parrying your opponent is simply too difficult, and downing a foe seems to take more luck than skill. My course of action was simply to run away from my attackers — most of the time, I'd be able to lose them by zig zagging down a few hallways. Still, the battles against the game's "bosses" are definitely going to take their toll on most gamers' sanity as is the constant banter. Your opponents *refuse* to shut up, screaming things like "I'll kill you!" and "I'm quick!" every two seconds. Can it, guys!

Redguard uses the latest version of Bethesda's Xngine technology, and it's looking mighty fine. The world appears rock-solid, with smooth fogging in the distance, nicely done textures, and beautiful level design. It's easily the prettiest game Bethesda's done so far. But as convincing as the gaming world is, there are still a few niggles that should have been worked out before the game's release.

Some of the game's collision detection and physics feel *very* shoddy. The platform-jumping is *almost* there, but Cyrus can get stuck in a few spots — in the aforementioned Scarab puzzle, it's possible to get lodged in the robot's belly, and Cyrus starts madly jiggling up and down as the camera goes haywire. The most serious graphical blemish lies in the animation — even though the rest of the world moves very smoothly, Cyrus and friends seem to be stuck at around 15 frames per second, making things look a little herky-jerky. The other major limitation of the Xngine is that its 3D support is limited to 3Dfx cards — gamers with RIVA TNT based boards or other non-3Dfx accelerators are outta luck.

The Dwarven Observatory is also home to a confounding puzzle; you'll have to figure out the locations of several constellations to save one of your friends.

The game ran very cleanly on my system, the only major flaw I discovered is that enemies can start kicking your ass during cut-scenes in which you can't fight. This first occurred when I was trying to get off the isle of the dead — as the camera switched back to show my boat floating away, a skeleton warrior jumped aboard and started slashing, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it. During the second half of the game, when all the guards in town are on a rampage, it's hard to have a conversation in public without having some armored guy run up and start bashing you mid sentence.

Still, *Redguard* managed to keep me coming back for more, and there's a *lot* of cool stuff I missed on my first play-through — which, may I add, took a long, *long* time. Despite *Redguard*'s niggles, I have no qualms about recommending it to anyone who's ready for an epic adventure with some really challenging puzzles — or to third-person action fans who are hungering for more than the predictable Tomb Raider formula. Nice job, Bethesda.

Colin Williamson

"...and your father smelt of elderberries!"

At the beginning of the game, you may find yourself in need of some swordplay practice — just head down to the *Draggin' Tale* inn, and start talking smack with the locals. After you tick them off with your verbal attacks, they'll take a break from their mead consumption to teach you a lesson you won't forget! Don't worry — this is just a practice session. You can't lose any health to these ruffians.

Give the local punks a physical beating along with the verbal one you're dishing out.

Even the most inexperienced Redguard wouldn't have a problem spanking these folks.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: An enormous gaming world with dozens of characters and brain-bending puzzles.

88%

LOWS: Combat and physics are a bit fishy; monsters can attack during cut-scenes.

BOTTOM LINE: *Redguard* successfully merges action and adventure into one tasty package.

West Front

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Wargame DEVELOPER: TalonSoft PUBLISHER: TalonSoft, (410) 933 9191, *www.talonsoft.com* REQUIRED: Windows 95, Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 133, 16MB RAM WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 200, 8x CD-ROM drive, 32MB RAM MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS: Null modem and serial connection, LAN; TCP/IP; Network IPX play (up to 16 players); Play-By-E-mail; Hot seat for two players

This sequel to *East Front* fulfills the promise of TalonSoft's new wargaming system. It doesn't get much better than this.

Landing craft churn helplessly in the surf, some of them drifting and afire. Machine gun bullets whip the water and mortar rounds throw up dirty spouts of sand American soldiers struggle ashore, try to sort themselves out into coherent units and start fighting back.

No, I'm not talking about the first 20 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*; I'm describing the Omaha Beach scenario in TalonSoft's *West Front*, the sequel to the promising but troubled *East Front*.

Even TalonSoft (with a candor that other companies might do well to emulate) admits that *East Front* was a "rushed" product. Frankly, none of the bugs and shortcomings bothered me all that much (when it comes to the Russian front, I'm a very forgiving gamer), but the company took an online pounding for its sins.

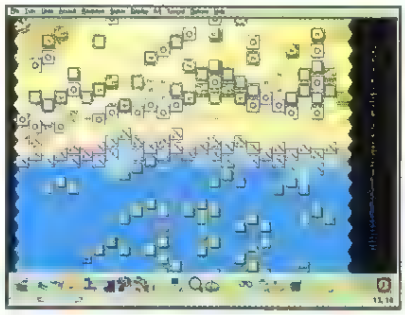
TalonSoft listened, took notes, and responded to its customers' suggestions and criticisms. Numerous enhancements were implemented and new features added. I doubt that even the crustiest grognards will find anything to complain about in *West Front*. It's a marked improvement over its predecessor in every department.

Among the new enhancements: glider and parachute drops; amphibious landings; off-shore naval gunfire support; enhanced command and control functions, improved AI that gets better in each successive campaign game (it studies your playing style and adjusts accordingly); and a simple but extremely useful line-of-sight routine. Not one of these incremental changes, by itself, would elevate the game sufficiently to satisfy the critics of *East Front*, but all of them together make for a sleek, exciting, rock solid wargame.

There are 50 new scenarios, ranging from North Africa to Northern Europe, many of them custom-designed by highly respected veterans like Jim Dunnigan, Richard Berg, and John Tiller (who played a major role in Talonsoft's Battleground series). In the generous scenario list, you'll find a lot of classics (Omaha Beach, the Bulge, Market Garden, etc.), but you'll also find a lot of refreshingly off-beat battles set in Norway, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Holland.

Two kinds of campaigns are available: the dynamic campaign features a series of linked, plausible, but randomly chosen scenarios; the linked campaign follows a strictly historical path. In the linked campaigns, the side you play and the size of your command are predetermined, in the dynamic campaigns, you're free to choose which side you want to command, which type of unit you want to start with (infantry, cavalry, or armor), and how large a unit you want to command. In these campaigns, you select your name and rank, and you're there on the battlefield with your troops; if you buy the farm, the campaign is over.

Here's a zoomed-in view of the German defenses on Omaha Beach. They look formidable because they are.



This is the same sector as above, now displayed in the conventional 2D format. Most players will switch back and forth as the situation develops on the battlefield.

No major changes appear in the interface, but you do have "extreme fog of war" and "tank facings" as realism options. The map and scenario editors have been massaged to perfection. Another new feature is Internet play that accommodates as many as eight players per side.

As has always been true in Talon Soft games, you can view the battlefield from a variety of displays. I generally like to plot maneuvers on the overhead 2D map, then switch to the close up 3D mode to watch the action unfold.

And great action it is, too. Units are crisply detailed, fortifications are textured to simulate wood or concrete, tracers spatter the targeted units, explosions are vivid and crunchy. There are a lot more barricades, pillboxes, and minefields in this game than found in *East Front*; you'd better be cautious about exposing your engineer platoons to hostile fire because they're the only units capable of breaching walls or nullifying field fortifications.

The 16 bit, high color graphics really are superb, whether they're depicting the wastelands of Tunisia or the bocage country in Normandy. Sound effects, too, are first-rate. In close up, you can even see the shadows cast by sandbags!

Capping off the improved engine is a beefy, 200-page manual, complete with a thorough tutorial and tons of equipment data. For all its detail, the game's basic system should not intimidate novices (even as it beguiles grognards). Do check the "readme" file before playing, however, since there are a few last minute changes you ought to know about before plunging in.

Good grief — *two* excellent wargames in a row (this one and Norm Koger's *Operational Art of War*)! TalonSoft is really on a roll.

William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Excellent graphics; interesting scenarios; high replay value due to scenario editor, online options.

LOWS: Arcane formulae in the manual may prove baffling to novices.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a substantial improvement over *East Front* and a thrilling combat sim.

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Fatal Abyss

CATEGORY Action DEVELOPER Human Soft PUBLISHER Segasoft, (888) SEGASOFT, *www.segasoft.com* REQUIRED Windows 95; Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166; 32MB RAM; 150MB hard-drive space; 2MB DirectX-compatible video card WE RECOMMEND 3D accelerator (3Dfx-based) MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS LAN, serial, and modem; Free play on HEAT.NET; Maximum players. 16

Underwater action at its most mediocre — this unoriginal game is all washed up.

It's a bad sign when you get a new game, load it up, and immediately wonder if you're playing a pre-release demo. Actually, I was *hoping* this was a pre-release demo — but since *PC Gamer* only reviews final code, the odds were slim.

Fatal Abyss has the look and feel of an incomplete game, but for once it's not due to bugs. No, it's the unresponsive control, bland graphics, and scrawny feature-list that make you think there must be a full version of *Fatal Abyss* — and you don't have it. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

Fatal Abyss could be called an underwater *Wing Commander* or a violent *Sub Culture*, but it pales in comparison to either of those games. You start a single-player campaign by choosing an allegiance between two underwater societies, the Eco Systems or Proteus Tech, which are bickering over an energy source. You're then sent solo on various undersea missions, from blowing up defense turrets to protecting big, slug-like transport craft.

No matter which side you ally with, you're always limited to three vehicles to choose from. They include a zippy little Scout, a medium sized Fast Attack Vehicle, and a chubby Heavy Assault Vehicle. They're supposed to be distinct, but the handling doesn't vary all that much from one craft to the next.

You're armed with a customizable assortment of the usual weapons: an unlimited, rapid firing, weak primary weapon, and a powerful but limited secondary weapon. The secondary weapons can be further broken down into homing missiles, dumb missiles, and gadgets like mines, flares, and enemy-debilitating EMP pods. It's all very standard

You probably haven't seen explosions this unimpressive since *Commander Keen*. Had this game come out in that era, it might have turned a head or two. But as it stands today, well....

When you've loaded up your craft, you're launched into an unimpressive underwater world that'll induce yearning for classic shooters like *Terminal Reality* or the original *Descent* — the graphics, even with 3D acceleration, are about as dated as those oldies, but the game isn't nearly as much fun Your craft runs on an unnamed form of energy, which you must replenish at remote docking stations located sporadically about the mission maps Everything from driving around to firing weapons costs energy, so you'll probably need to top it off at least two or three times in each mission. Taking damage indirectly costs you energy, too: as your ship takes enemy fire, it depletes your shields — you can set them to auto-repair, but that rebuilds shield strength at the cost of energy.

You'll never see the surface of the watery world. The vehicles were designed for a certain depth range, and if you travel deeper or shallower, your ship is damaged. That alone is the single beacon of originality in an otherwise dull game

Though *Fatal Abyss* supports 3Dfx based cards, it doesn't look very good at all. The low-res textures are really chunky, and the explosions are just flat, animated sprites. Controlling your vehicle is a complicated matter of adjusting for sluggish input response and really fast movement, causing you to overcompensate for everything. It also makes lining up unguided weapon shots hellishly difficult.

There's extremely little in *Fatal Abyss* that hasn't been done before — and done better. If you're looking for a fast, fun action game, try one of the alternatives mentioned in this review. Spending cash on *Fatal Abyss* will leave you feeling hung out to dry.

—Joel Durham Jr.

You'll have to make do with only three types of subs to battle in the briny depths, no matter which side you're on.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

24%

HIGHS: Depth boundaries adds some originality to a tired formula.

LOWS: No Direct3D support (it's 3Dfx-only); outdated graphics; boring, unoriginal gameplay; quirky control.

BOTTOM LINE: *Fatal Abyss* lives up to its name: it's fatally abysmal.

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Tomb Raider III

CATEGORY Action DEVELOPER: Core Design PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive, (415) 538 0999, *www.eidosinteractive.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium 166 (or a P133 with a 3D accelerator), 16MB RAM, DirectX compatible sound and video cards WE RECOMMEND 8x CD-ROM drive, Pentium 233, 32MB RAM; 3D accelerator (Direct3D-compatible) MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS None

Lara's back in this latest installment to her action-adventure series — but it's getting harder and harder to care.

Lara, it's time to break out the Oil of Olay. You're starting to show your age

Actually, that's not entirely correct — in *Tomb Raider III*, Lara still looks as scrumptious as ever. It's the overworked game engine that's starting to come apart at the seams.

Let's take a look at what's transpired in the gaming industry since the original *Tomb Raider* was shiny and new: *Quake* gave way to *Quake II*, which has since been over thrown by wondrous titles like *Half-Life* and *Unreal*. 3D acceleration has made awe-inspiring graphics commonplace, as illustrated in games as diverse as *Forsaken*, *NFL Blitz*, and *Falcon 4.0*, to name a few. Realism has made its way into the action-adventure scene; look at the engaging environments of *Half-Life* and the physics in the flawed but admirable *Trespasser*. And while the Tomb Raider games once had a corner on the third-person-perspective market, they no longer stand out from a crowd that includes the amazing *Heretic II* and the upcoming *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine*

After the hotly anticipated *Tomb Raider II* made less of a splash than the gaming world expected, we all figured Eidos would pull something incredible out of its hat for Lara Croft's third outing. Surely the series would be pulled into the present with a new engine, better camera management, more sensible puzzles, more responsive controls, and a host of other improvements, right?

Wrong.

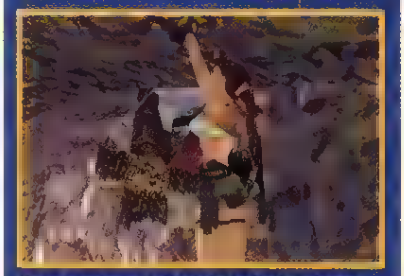
Tomb Raider III is mired in the same engine the others were built on It's undergone modest retooling to choke a bit more life out of it, but there's really nothing new here All of the compliments and complaints we gave to *TR2* translate neatly to this new game but that opens the door for a new complaint: the designers obviously didn't learn from the mistakes they made with the first two games.

The new *Tomb Raider* finds Lara up to her usual tricks: trotting the globe, spelunking through ancient

The truth is out: Lara's nothing without her guns! During an escape from a military prison in the Area 51 segment, an unarmed Lara has to rely on fellow prisoners to subdue the guards.

New Tricks FOR AN Old Dog

Lara's current game engine may be getting long in the tooth, but that doesn't prevent her from whipping out a few new moves for this go-'round



Keep your eyes to the sky to find surfaces that Lara can hang from and maneuver along, jungle-gym style! Just don't let go of that action key, when you find Lara hanging from the rafters, she's usually dangling over some deadly territory.

Lara can drop to all fours at any time to scamper under obstacles, hide from bad guys, and even scrub the kitchen floor! (Just kidding about that last one.)

Lara's been doing some training since her last outing, including a rigorous regimen of wind-sprints. When she needs to clear the area faster than usual, she can put on an extra burst of speed. It only lasts a few seconds and is represented by a green bar in the upper right corner of the screen.

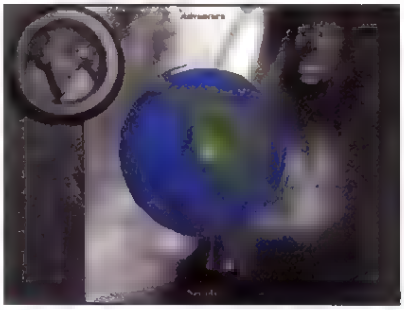
ruins, mercilessly killing endangered species that get in her way, and so on This time, she's seeking out four crystals deposited in the Antarctic by a meteorite and scattered onto various continents through the efforts of Charles Darwin the plot is far more thoughtful and intriguing than the gameplay. *TR3* may have been better off as a graphic adventure

The quest begins in Africa, where Lara's confronted with the standard Indiana Jones setting that will be extremely familiar to anyone who played the previous games: ancient, underground passages and rolling boulder traps. Once you've guided her through that locale, though, the game opens up a bit

You actually get to choose the order in which you take on the next three locations. the streets, rooftops and subways of London, the top secret military base known as Area 51; or an exotic isle in the South Pacific When you've snagged meteorite fragments in each of those areas. the adventure culminates in Antarctica.

Each of the locations features several huge levels This game will take a long time to play through, especially if you don't peek at a walk through Be prepared for a *lot* of doubling back and reloading saved games, though the traps are harder than ever, and the puzzles defy all logic and reason There are more key- and switch-hunts in this game than in both Quake games combined. and you often have to do some more hunting just to figure out what *effect* a turned key or thrown switch had And the locations of keys and switches often make no sense: why, for instance, would the switch that opens the stove hood in a prison kitchen be hidden in the ductwork? Who would build switches into cliff walls, where they're accessible only by climbing to precarious ledges? Finding your way to the end of a level without cheating feels less like a victory than a major psychic event

Next to current games, the graphics in *TR3* are underwhelming. No matter what you've read in the ad hype, *TR3* has the same blocky look of its ancestors Lighting and transparency effects add a bit to the atmosphere, but not enough to write home about Nothing has been done to enhance the camera management, so the worst problems of *Tomb Raider II* remain intact: once again, you'll have to line up tricky jumps while looking in the wrong direction, and fire on enemies you can't see Come on, folks, even *Space Bunnies Must Die* did a better job with its third person camera than this game does!

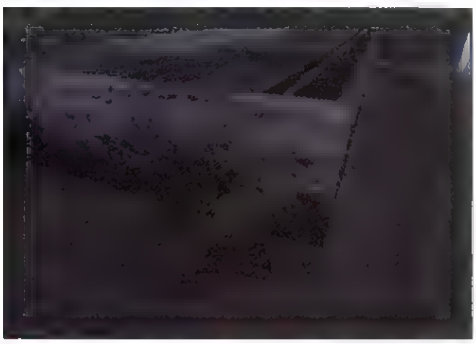


Lara's adventures aren't entirely linear in *Tomb Raider III*; after completing the first segment of the game, she can choose the order in which she tackles the next three locales.

Also like the last game, *TR3* requires Lara to take the helm of a handful of vehicles to make her way through some of the levels. Early on, you'll guide her through an underground gorge on a four wheeler, and later she'll hop into a speedboat and a kayak. These sequences represent the best portions of the game; the feel of the vehicles has obviously been given a lot of care, and control is far better than when Lara's on her feet. Maybe it's time for *Lara Croft's Speedboat Racing*

Speaking of controlling Lara: the levels in this game don't seem to have been designed to accommodate her limitations the way they were in the first game (and, to some extent, the second one) Navigating many of the narrow ledges, thin hallways, and sudden traps requires finesse and responsiveness — something the Tomb Raider games have never offered. In fact, this game makes it worse: the sidestepping and dive-rolling controls have been altered, rendering unreliable any control scheme you might have gotten used to with the previous games

An example There's one sequence in which Lara's running down a narrow, sloped hallway, when a large boulder is released behind her (actually, there are about 20 such sequences). In this particular one, she escapes the boulder by running to the end of the hall and crawling through a low passageway on the right It was pretty clear what Lara was supposed to do, but I still had to play through this sequence about ten times. That's because, while Lara has been given the power to sprint in *TR3*, she comes to a *complete stop* before crouching Getting through that opening took a miracle of timing and that was one of the more forgiving traps in this game



The game engine has been retooled yet again, but most of its original problems remain untouched As you can see here, 3D clipping is just as bad as ever.

Among other new dangers, Lara must contend with quicksand to survive *Tomb Raider III*.

The sloppy design and threadbare technology woven into this title smacks of greed — it looks like the very popular Tomb Raider franchise is being milked for every penny of profit without any great regard for quality. But if gamers send the message that it's bad business to release a second-rate, low-effort sequel — by leaving this title in the store — maybe we can look forward to something creative and worthwhile for *Tomb Raider IV* Or maybe there won't be a *Tomb Raider IV*

Joel Durham Jr

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

49%

HIGHS: New moves and vehicles and an interesting plot add some spice.

LOWS: Dated graphics; poor camera management; pointless puzzles; unresponsive control; way too difficult.

BOTTOM LINE: It's way past time for Eidos and Core to take a new look at Lara.

Test Drive 5

CATEGORY Arcade racing DEVELOPER Pitbull Syndicate PUBLISHER Accolade, (800) 245-7744, *www.accolade.com* REQUIRED Windows 95/98 with DirectX 6, P166MHz, 32MB RAM; 4x CD drive; 150MB HD space, Direct3D compatible video card with 4MB memory, DirectX-compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND P233MHz, 3dfx based video card with 8MB memory, Steering wheel and pedals MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS Serial, Modem, IPX, Spawnable No, Free Internet play No, Max players 6

It won't dethrone *Need For Speed III* as king of the arcade racers, but the latest in this venerable series still delivers a big dose of high-speed action.

Despite a well-targeted TV ad campaign during the holiday shopping season, *Test Drive 5* hasn't generated much of a buzz — either favorable or negative — among fans of arcade-style racing games for the PC. That's a little surprising, because while *Test Drive 5* doesn't feature all the bells and whistles of Electronic Arts' *Need for Speed III*, it's still an extremely solid racing game that's almost as much of a joy to look at as it is to play.

TD5's greatest strength is its variety, both in cars and tracks. Although you won't find models from high-brow manufacturers like Ferrari, Lamborghini, and Mercedes in this game's line-up, it makes up for their absence with nearly two dozen cars drawn from a period of more than 30 years. Newer cars include 1998 models of the Dodge Viper, Saleen Mustang, Corvette, Nissan Skyline, TVR Cerbera, Jaguar XKR, and the Aston-Martin Vantage, as well as a 1997 Camaro Z28, meanwhile, muscle-car fans can hop into all sorts of dream machines from the 1960s and early 1970s, including a GTO, a Charger, a Chevelle SS, a 'Cuda, a Corvette, a Camaro, and two types of Mustangs ('66 Shelby and a '68 Fastback). Toss in all the secret cars that are locked until you perform well enough against competition, and *TD5* boasts nine more rides than *NFS III* (although EA has put three more cars online for download).

The scenery graphics in *Test Drive 5* are incredible, especially in cities and towns.

You know you're driving an arcade racer instead of a sim when the only driver's view doesn't let you see the dashboard or hood!

Cop Chase has the potential to be a lot of fun — if the manual would give you a clue as to what you're supposed to do once you catch a speeder, that is.

Besides standard game modes like Single Race, Cup Mode (a tour of circuits or rallies), and Time Trial, *TD5* adds options for drag racing and to play as a cop assigned to stopping the speed freaks blazing through your jurisdiction. Unfortunately, drag racing is fun for all of about two races (partly because it only has a single-player mode), and the Cop Chase mode is extremely limited compared to the one in *NFS III* — not to mention the fact that the manual doesn't even tell you how to make an arrest once you finally pull over a speeder.

Visually, the difference between this title and the gorgeous *NFS III* is negligible. The eye candy is really impressive on city courses, thanks to extremely detailed landmarks and true 3D buildings (although the same buildings are used repeatedly). Instant Replays are particularly stunning, not only when you see a pack of cars catching a ridiculous amount of air in a city setting, but also when you check out the graphic details on the cars themselves. For driving music, Accolade lined up a handful of metal outfits like Fear Factory and Gravity Kills; whether that's a plus or minus depends on your musical tastes.

There are definitely a few nits to pick with *Test Drive 5*. Car setup is limited to transmission type, and in many cases it seems the only significant difference in how cars handle is in acceleration. Sound effects are on the thin side, and the lack of VCR-style controls makes Instant Replay less gratifying than it could be.

Even without an option for Internet play, though, there's enough action in *Test Drive 5* to help you look past these shortcomings. If you're deciding which arcade racer to add your collection, this one's definitely worth a look — but do yourself a favor and make sure you check out *Need for Speed III*, too.

—Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

81%

HIGHS: Mind-blowing terrain graphics on a variety of real-world tracks; cars look fantastic.

LOWS: Weak sound effects; no options for tweaking car set-ups; sensation of speed isn't convincing.

BOTTOM LINE: Lots of fun, but check out the demo before buying to see if it's what you're after.

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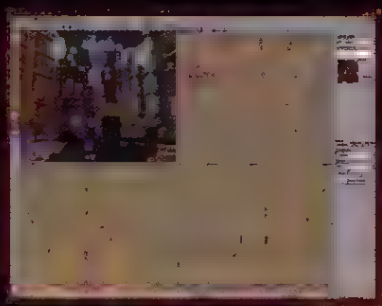

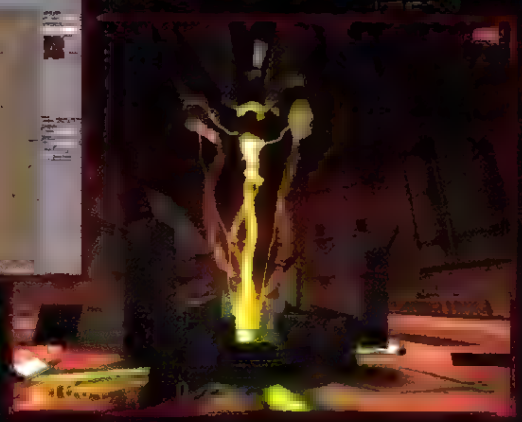

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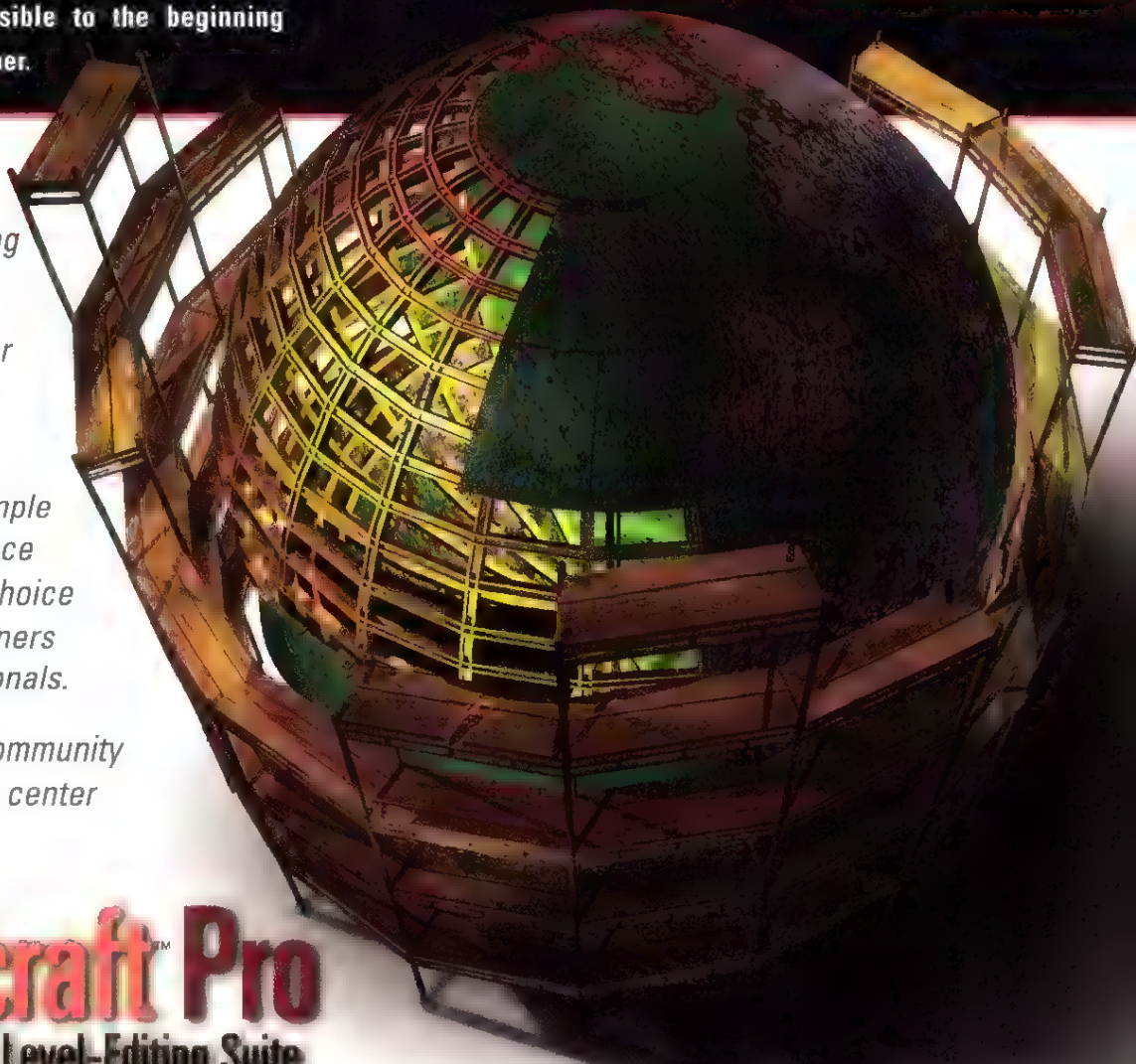

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Populous: The Beginning

CATEGORY Strategy DEVELOPER Bullfrog PUBLISHER Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Quad speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, 100 MB hard-drive space WE RECOMMEND 8x CD-ROM drive, Pentium 200, 32 MB RAM 100MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator (Direct3D compatible) MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS: Modem: 28.8+; Serial: 2 players; IPX: 2-4 players; TCP/IP: 2-4 players; Max Players: 4, Spawnable: No

Bullfrog's sequel to the classic god game is part strategy game and part 3D action game — but succeeds at neither.

For people who remember Bullfrog's *Populous* and *Populous II*, *Populous: The Beginning* is likely to come as a rude shock. It bears little resemblance to those classic strategy games, in which you played a godlike figure using his power to direct followers in a quest for supremacy over nonbelievers. You didn't so much command these followers as influence them through a little godly persuasion and fear. Getting them to do what you want was one of the appealing challenges of the game, along with the ability to cast Olympian spells and warp the landscape itself.

Bullfrog, however, has wandered far from that formula to create something unique — but ultimately less fulfilling. It's as though they started to make a sequel to *Populous* and ended up with one to *Magic Carpet 2*, with a detour toward *Dungeon Keeper* along the way. If that sounds like an uneasy mix, it is.

At first glance, *Populous: The Beginning* appears to be a standard Populous game with a brand new 3D engine. In practice, however, it's a completely different beast. Some of the salient points of the originals are indeed here: You do have a grab-bag of great spells, you do have followers, and you can alter the landscape. But rather than being a full-blown, thunderbolt-wielding god-from-the-mountain-top, you're a god-in-training called the Shaman. Instead of influencing your worshippers, you actually lead them into battle and physically control their movements and actions, real-time strategy-style.

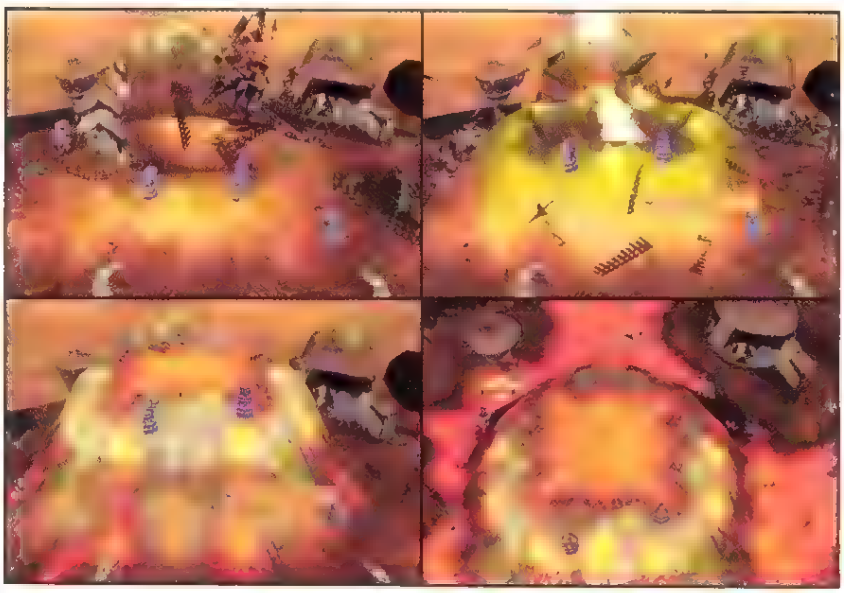
A lightning spells livens up an otherwise overly familiar aspect of *Populous: The Beginning*: grouping a bunch of guys and attacking in force.

The Shaman (a female figure) is the core unit in the game, a boss-level ass-kicker rather than an aloof deity. As a god wannabe, she needs to prove her mettle by conquering the universe through a series of hard-wired scenarios. Each scenario in the ongoing campaign begins with your Shaman and a small group of followers in a Reincarnation Circle, and each one follows the same course: You must create or convert more followers, train them, and kill any other Shamans on the map. There are several ways to do this, but the basic pattern rarely wavers, and that's the heart of the problem.

The campaign follows a direct path through a series of planetary conquest missions. The globes are all fairly small, and you begin each new battle with a guided tour of the planet to point out special sites and mission objectives. These landscapes are rendered in bright, reasonably detailed 3D, full of mountains, oceans, trees, structures, and followers. You can zoom in and out, rotate in any direction, and fly around the whole planet with simple keyboard commands. The resemblance to Bullfrog's *Magic Carpet* is strong, but instead of using the 3D to provide a you-are-there perspective, *Populous: The Beginning* simply uses it to render the world, with the central figures in the action represented by little guys running around.

The tour of each map not only shows you the goals and highlights, but pretty much tells you how to solve each battle (and there *is* a definite solution; it's not simply a matter of sound strategic planning). First, you must train your basic follower units, the Braves, to be either Warriors or Priests, the only combatant classes in the whole game. Braves can gather wood and build structures. When placed in a hut, they get busy making other Braves. Braves can also build a Warrior Hut (in which to train Warriors), Temple (to train Priests), Guard Tower (for better defense), Fire Warrior Hut (makes Warriors into Fire Warriors), Spy Hut (trains Spies), Balloon Hut (makes hot air balloons), and Boat hut (makes boats).

That's pretty much it for buildings and units. Warriors and Fire Warriors fight the battles, preachers can convert the enemy to your cause and prevent



This sequence of shots shows the awesome power of the volcano spell, one of many in the Shaman's arsenal. Cast at the center of the Shaman's Reincarnation site, the spell wreaks havoc on the entire village, but also costs a huge amount of your mana.

Your little Braves are the heart of your kingdom; they build villages, make more Braves, and can be trained as fighters.

your units from being converted, and spies can dress in enemy garb and sabotage buildings. Any of these followers can be placed in a boat to cross water or in a hot air balloon to cross mountains. The only really novel touch is the ability to rain fire attacks from balloons.

The interface is pretty well designed to enable easy control of your little dudes; each follower type is represented on the menu bar by an icon with a number. Click the icon once to select one, Ctrl-click to select five of the unit type, and Shift click to select all of that unit type. You can use this process to build an entire army of different unit types, then click a destination and send the whole mass into battle.

Landscapes are dotted with special buildings and structures that give bonuses and spells when your Shaman and/or followers pray to them. Totems give you special attacks or sometimes trigger specific events, like the raising of a land bridge across the water. Inside enemy territory, a Vault of Knowledge provides your Shaman with special wisdom (usually a spell) held by your opponent but not by you. Some spells are single-mission only; others stay in your repertoire for the duration of the game. If your followers are happy and productive (i.e., busy with tasks such as gathering wood, training, building, or making more followers), then you gain mana, which is needed to cast spells. You can turn spell-charging on or off for each spell, so if you know you'll only need a lightning spell during the current mission, you can stop charging all your others.

The Angel of Death spell is first unleashed on your people early in the game, but you don't get to add its hellish attack to your full-time spellbook until many missions later.

What you wind up with is a pretty standard real time strategy game with very few units and buildings and a decent graphics engine. Tactically, *Populous: The Beginning* becomes nothing more than building a larger army than the other guy and bashing his brains in with the added effect of a few cool spells. Few missions deviate from this tank rush-style tactical formula, although some impose time limits or mission specific goals other than complete conquest. Eventually, the missions become mind-numbingly repetitive and are rarely very challenging. Despite some visual flourishes and an effective array of land-warping and death-dealing spells, *Populous: The Beginning* is a disappointment that doesn't live up to the legacy of the first two games.

—T. Liam McDonald

Sure, you have a few boats in your arsenal, but they're basically transports, and do little but save you from having to build land bridges.

I Put a Spell on You

S[illegible] in *Populous*, your Shaman's collection of spells [illegible] enemy to change the landscape.

Blast: A basic fire blast spell that knocks aside and wounds everything in its path, friendly or enemy.

Swarm: Releases a swarm of stinging insects that chase and sting the enemy.

Convert: The islands are crawling with neutral "wildmen" going about their business. This spell turns all wildmen in a limited radius into your followers.

Lightning: Produces a potent blast of lightning that seriously damages anything in range. Will kill most units and heavily damage buildings.

Swamp: Turns the ground into a morass that will swallow anything foolish enough to enter. Can take up to ten enemy followers before it stops working.

Land Bridge: Raises earth from the oceans in order to bridge islands.

Rain of Fire: Turns rain into fireballs wiping out anything it hits.

Volcano: Turns a huge swath of enemy land into a boiling volcano, swallowing buildings and units. Devastating, but with a high casting cost.

Tornado: Summons a twister that effectively tears apart buildings and tosses followers into the air. Can easily turn on the caster, however.

Angel of Death: Summons a huge demon to lay waste to your enemy. The ultimate destroyer spell.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Wild, ever-changing game world; spells and bonus effects are interesting.

LOWS: Missions too puzzle-oriented; limited elements and units reduce this to a simple RTS game.

BOTTOM LINE: Pretty to look at and fun to tinker with, but missions are drab and not very challenging.

LIGHTNING ST

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– **Computer Gaming World**

"The detail in *Seven Kingdoms* makes *Age of Empires* look like checkers."

– **GamePower**

"★★★★"

– **Computer Games Strategy Plus**

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"Building upon the success of Interactive Magic's empire-building game *Seven Kingdoms*, Trevor Chan has sought out perfection..."
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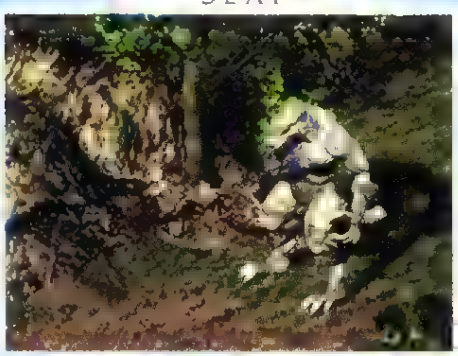

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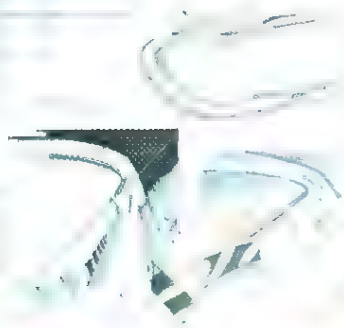
What makes JEFF GORDON® XS RACING great?

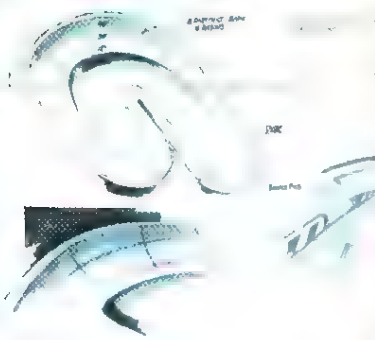
Let's be honest - building a great racing game that rises above the competition is not an easy task.

We knew we had jumped into a cluttered category where mediocrity was the norm, but **Jeff Gordon XS Racing** had to be the **best**. We needed a game that appealed to both the demanding racing game fanatic, as well as the gamer just looking to have **fun**.

That's when **Real Sports** was brought in. They demonstrated an amazing set of programming **tools, experience** and **desire** to build the game we wanted. **Robin Antonick**, President of **Real Sports** and father of six, even **races** cars on the weekends.



One of the biggest challenges we faced was to make a game that was **accessible** to **everybody**. To do so, we set out to make a game that would run smoothly on a **P166** with **16 MB RAM** without requiring the use of a 3D graphics accelerator. Of course, we also wanted to make it **scream** on a **P450** with huge amounts of RAM and **dual Voodoo 2 cards**, as well as a variety of other graphics cards.



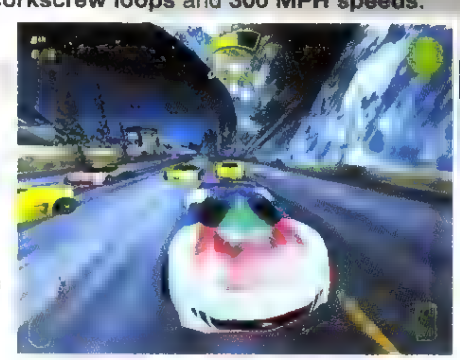
The game offers menu options that allow the user to adjust the level of detail on the tracks and cars. This was the first step in making the game compatible with as many machines as possible. Items such as **environmental mapping** (*a technique that allows for lighting and the environment to reflect off of the car*), clip distance (*the distance at which the horizon begins to draw in*), and polygons per car, all needed to be adjustable as well, on a per machine basis. **The frame rate is exceptional on a wide selection of machines either with the use of a 3D card or without.**

Other potential areas of conflict occured when trying to make the game compatible with 3D graphics accelerator cards. We made the decision early on to support **Direct 3D,** which will **allow us to run on all 3D cards**, not only **3Dfx** (*in glide mode*) like many accelerated games. However, different 3D card chipsets may support graphics in varying ways. For example, to give the effect that a car is actually racing on the ground, and not hovering over the track, we implemented a transparent shadow effect under the car to give it the perspective of being close to the ground. Well, we quickly discovered that on some 3D cards, transparent shadows were not supported the same across the 3D boards. **The result:** some shadows looked like shadows, and some shadows looked like magic carpets under the cars - not quite the look we were going for. But in the end, our experiments with 3D cards will ensure as much overall compatiblity as possible.

The real test **of developing a racing game** is **speed**. We can tell you that you're going **300 MPH**, but does it really look and feel that way? **The truth is:** in videogames, like movies, **special effects play a major role in adding to the experience.** The special effect in racing games is frame rate. For all you know, the track may be moving at **300 MPH** and your car is standing still. But does it matter as long as the player feels like they're **zipping** along at top speeds? However it's done, no matter what it takes to move a polygonal car with polygonal tires around a polygonal track in a rectangle monitor on top of your desk, **we've been able to transform frame rate into an incredible sensation of speed.**

So, as we head into the final months before release, we've turned our development challenges into some **awesome game features**:

•10 Extreme tracks that include everything from **jumps** and **high-banked turns** to **corkscrew loops** and **300 MPH speeds.**



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Windows® 95
PC CD-ROM

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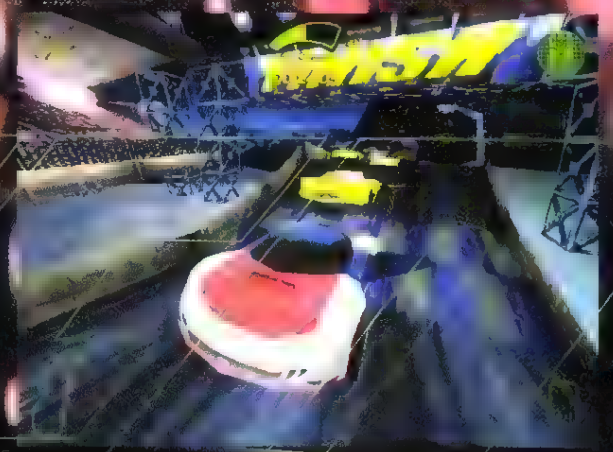
•**Serious competition**. Doesn't it seem like every racing game out there lets you **smash** your opponents into the wall and they don't mind? Well, we didn't want that. If the term artificial intelligence wasn't so overused, then you can say ours is really **awesome**. But instead, let's just say watch out for the car that you just sent flying into the wall at **230 MPH -it will remember you.**

•**Intense graphics** that, to put it bluntly, rock!!! The tracks are set in **richly detailed, brightly colored environments** that are soaked with some pretty **impressive lighting effects**. But of course, if you're good at this game, the environments will look like colorful blurs.

Does all of this make **Jeff Gordon® XS Racing™** the best racing game on the PC? Well, we'll give you the same answer that **Jeff Gordon** gives when he's asked if he's the best **NASCAR** driver around ---

"The competition is fierce out there and one day you can be the best and the next day you're a spec in somebody's rear view mirror. But, if the fans just can't get enough of the action, then we must be doing something right."

"Making a good game was not the plan. Jeff Gordon® XS Racing™ had to be the best."



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NHRA Drag Racing

CATEGORY: Racing DEVELOPER: Tantrum PUBLISHER: Mind Magic, (800) 762-6443, *www.mindmagic.com* REQUIRED: Windows 95, Double-speed CD-ROM drive, Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space, DirectX-compatible sound card; 3D accelerator (Direct3D-compatible) WE RECOMMEND: Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM; Joystick or racing wheel MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS: None

It's got the official endorsement of the National Hot Rod Association, but it's still only the second-best drag-racing sim going.

When Bethesda's *Burnout* landed on my desk a few months ago, I truly didn't expect a drag racing game to be entertaining. How much fun can it be to drive a few hundred yards in a straight line?

Turns out it is fun but the real challenge is found in the garage; building and tooling the perfect car, whose clutch and suspension complement its fierce horsepower, is subtly addictive. The actual race becomes less an event and more a final test of your engineering mettle.

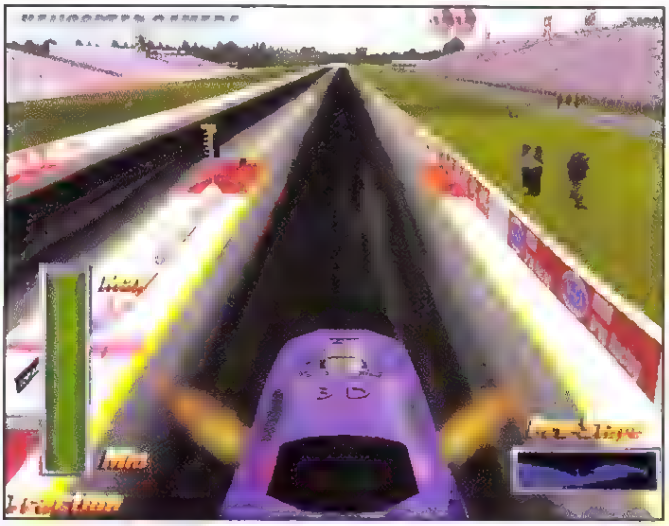
That explains both the success of *Burnout* and the shortcomings of the latest drag racing game, Mind Magic's *NHRA Drag Racing*. Officially endorsed by the National Hot Rod Association, *NHRA* is a sharp-looking game that plays reasonably well but lacks the substance of the Bethesda game.

In the spirit of any good sim, *NHRA*'s framework has everything you could ask for; you can play a practice session, a single day's competition or a full season in either a funny car or a top-fuel dragster. Three skill levels make it easy for anyone to get into. The lowest does everything for you except steer the car, while the highest skill level requires you to tweak your vehicle's engine, transmission, and chassis. In an interesting touch, the low and medium skill levels require you to appoint a crew chief who will tune your car for you. During the selection process, you can read short biographies of real NHRA crew chiefs and select the one whose style best matches your own.

The pits are where you can tweak your car — but only to a small extent — to make it the fastest sled on the track.

Your goal in the garage is to create the perfect blend of raw engine power and the right tools to handle it. Too much horsepower without a capable transmission will cause your tires to spin on the pavement; too little will leave you sucking your opponent's exhaust.

So what's wrong with *NHRA*? The main problem is that tuning your vehicle is oversimplified. Basically, you get to tweak eight sliders to adjust things like clutch timing, cylinder pressure, or the nitromethane content of your fuel. Tantrum is to be commended for the ease with which a novice can get into the game even at the highest difficulty level, and also for the brief but well written instruction manual. A few hours in the pits will get you a blazingly fast car — but by then you'll have exhausted most of the game's possibilities. An advanced mode, with more numerous and realistic vehicle adjustments, could've extend the life of this game.



Staging is done realistically, complete with a "burnout" phase in which you rev your engine to warm up your tires and work up the crowd.

There's more emphasis on actually racing than there is on car-tweaking. Fortunately, the races are executed well, with sharp graphics, excellent sound effects, and responsive control. Further, track conditions are realistically affected by the heat of the pavement and the altitude of the raceway.

You get a good view of the action, with excellent, dynamic camera control. Four cameras track each race, with seven zoomable positions each. They're all accessible for post race instant replays, too. The replay interface leaves something to be desired, though, offering merely a play and pause button. Forward, reverse, and especially slow motion would all have been useful.

Possibly the biggest disappointment, though, is the lack of multi player support. Tune your car all you want, practice until you're off the line within a millisecond of the green, and you still can't prove yourself against other humans the way you can in *Burnout*.

It's been said that races are won or lost in the pits. *NHRA Drag Racing* is a decent all-around game, but its lack of depth in vehicle management means *Burnout* leaves it on the line. Die hard NHRA fans and technophobes with an interest in drag racing (do such people exist?) will find some value in this game, but real gearheads will grow bored with it after a few hours.

Joel Durham Jr

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Nice graphics; excellent racing interface.

LOWS: Simplistic vehicle management drains the challenge and longevity out of this game; no multi-player options.

BOTTOM LINE: Died-in-the-wool drag racing fans should look elsewhere.

http://pc.ign.com

O.D.T.

CATEGORY Action-adventure DEVELOPER FDI French Studio PUBLISHER Psygnosis (650) 655 8000 *www.psygnosis.com* REQUIRED Windows 95/98, Pentium 120, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16MB RAM (3D accelerator) or 24MB (software emulation), 2MB HD space, 1MB video card, DirectX Sound compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND Pentium 200MHz, 8X CD-ROM drive, 32MB RAM, 150MB HD space, 3Dfx or AGP video card, Sound Blaster 16-bit sound card MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS None

_O.D.T._ invokes the memory of classic games like _Tomb Raider_ and _Alone in the Dark_, but its frustrating controls and derivative gameplay condemn it to mediocrity.

Here's some advice for anyone working on a game that's even remotely like *Tomb Raider*: If you don't get anything else right, at least make sure the control system is top-notch. And if you need proof that my little axiom has merit, just spend a little time with *Escape... Or Die Trying*, or *O.D.T.* for short.

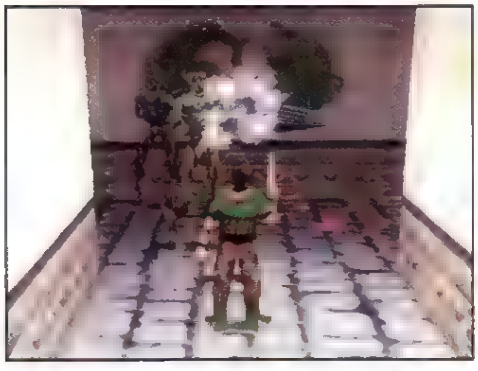
Unlike many action games, *O.D.T.* has a storyline that, if properly developed and integrated into gameplay, could add much to the overall experience. Set in a fictional world ravaged by a deadly plague, *O.D.T.* casts you as one of four crew members aboard a prop-driven dirigible that's crashed in uncharted territory while on a mission to stop the spread of the disease. When you return after scouting around for gas for the dirigible, you discover that the captain — along with the green pearl that was the only hope for halting the epidemic — is missing.

But from this point on the story becomes little more than an afterthought that's passed along in animated video clips shown at the start of each level. As the captain becomes embroiled in a thrilling adventure complete with jailbreaks and the discovery of the mysteries behind the pearl and the enemies who want it destroyed, *you* embark on a scavenger hunt in search of bottles of gas, pieces of magic crystal, and of course keys and passcards required to explore new levels. So while you get to see the story unfold, you don't really take part in it.

O.D.T. tries to liven up the standard third-person combat and exploration formula by letting you play as one of four characters, among them a Lara-look-a-like and an "archbishop" who has a bird constantly circling over him (I prayed the bird would answer nature's call, but it never did). In addition, there are 16 spells the characters can learn, which cover everything from restoring health to freezing enemies in a block of ice.

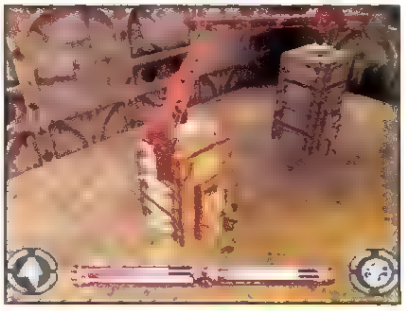
But any extra fun provided by multiple characters and the addition of spells is nixed by a control system that suffers the same fate as so many third-person action games: it's too damn hard to see what's going on. As the perspective pans and zooms in a desperate attempt to keep your character in view, you'll find yourself running into walls, wasting ammo by missing easy targets, and plunging to your death on a fairly regular basis. The lack of mouse support means the only way to look around is to draw your weapon, but that prevents you from moving. Want to crouch down and toss a grenade through an opening at floor level? Tough — you can't throw anything while crouching. Fortunately, the enemies are so stupid that victory is pretty much assured as long as you've scraped up enough ammo to keep up a steady stream of fire.

I've got to admit that after several frustrating hours I finally got the hang of movement and combat, but just as I was patting myself on the back, I encountered *O.D.T.*'s platform-game elements — and started pulling my hair out all over again. Just making some of these jumps is frustrating enough, and that feeling is exacerbated by the insane decision to use console-style "save points" rather than a standard in-level save feature. So if you do play *O.D.T.*, expect to be covering the same ground over and over again — sometimes for something as insignificant as a power-up.



These bi-pedal enemies look imposing, but they're actually as dumb as rocks and make for easy targets.

Load your all-purpose pistol with ionic ammo, and you'll easily be able to take out several enemies with one sustained squeeze of the trigger.



O.D.T.'s dicey control system isn't as much of a problem when faced with puzzles like this one, where you must align the cranes in order to reach an exit.

If *O.D.T.* developer FDI French Studio had opted to cast you as the captain and designed an action adventure along the lines of *Alone in the Dark*, the game's clumsy controls would probably be little more than an annoyance. But with the story shoved firmly to the background, we're left with a gussied-up *Tomb Raider* clone — and only an average one at that.

Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

51%

HIGHS: Combo of spells and weapons adds depth to gameplay; nice graphics effects; good story.

LOWS: Frustrating control; primitive save-game feature; not enough combat; simplistic enemy AI.

BOTTOM LINE: Moderately interesting once the interface is mastered, but not much more.

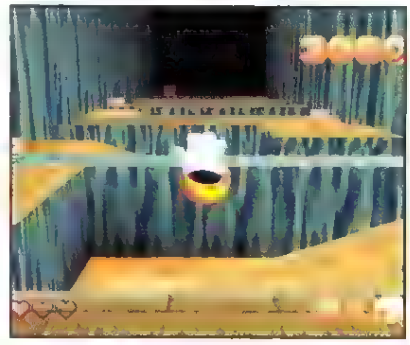
Glover

CATEGORY Action DEVELOPER Interactive Studios PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive, (617) 746-2903, *www.hasbro.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Pentium 133, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16MB RAM WE RECOMMEND Pentium 200, 8x CD-ROM drive, Direct3D compatible graphics card, Supported sound card, Analog gamepad MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS None

Most gamers will be ready to follow this bouncing ball right into the recycle bin.

For the past several months, it seems, we've seen a shortage of unique and off-the wall gameplay concepts, developers have stuck pretty close to traditional shooters, racers, and the like. So when *Glover* crossed my desk, I perked up — after all, it's a game that stars a disembodied hand, of all things, making it one of the odder concepts since *A Boy and his Blob* on the Nintendo.

Glover begins with a cautionary tale that warns against mixing magic potions with articles of clothing: a powerful wizard is messing about in his lab when he accidentally causes an explosion that supernaturally animates both of his gloves. While the *good* glove is thrown clear of the explosion, the other flies into a bubbling cauldron and becomes corrupted with the power of Pure Evil. Now, as Glover, you must go and recover Seven Magic Stone Thingies that have been scattered to the outskirts of the kingdom, and beat the stuffing out of the Evil Glove, who has somehow managed to transform your happy Disney-esque kingdom into a postapocalyptic landscape.



Here in the training room, you'll discover just how screwy *Glover*'s control is.

What all of the above means is that you're put in control of the game's main character, a walking and talking white glove. The basic goal of each stage is to find a rubber ball that contains one of the Magic Stone Thingies and safely transport it through the level by pushing it, throwing it, or jumping on it like a trampoline. You can also transform the ball into a bowling ball, which can easily crush crates; a ball bearing, which makes it easier to navigate small areas; or a magical crystal that seems to break a lot and not do much of anything.

Unfortunately, *Glover*'s actual gameplay is so utterly screwed up, there's really not much point. When you're playing as Glover by himself, the control is fine — you just trot around and platform-jump to your heart's content. But once you get the ball, get ready for some headaches; keeping tabs on the damn thing gets horribly annoying. Your precious bouncing ball keeps rolling off cliffs and forcing you to go back to the beginning of many levels — or to the options screen to commit "suicide." The incredibly fiddly controls essentially require an analog gamepad; playing with the keyboard is simply not an option. *Glover* does virtually nothing right except when it comes time to throw the ball: when you punch the button to give it a toss, the game draws a parabola displaying where your pitch will go.

Graphically, *Glover* is merely passable — the Direct3D-accelerated visuals look about on par with Hasbro's disappointing *Frogger*. The animation and modeling, which aim for a more abstract look, aren't particularly wonderful — Glover himself looks like a slightly mutated version of the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man from *Ghostbusters*.

Even though the levels of *Glover* aren't all that poorly designed, the seemingly drunken camera system frequently gets "stuck," resulting in myriad cheap hits and early deaths. You can save yourself a headache by starting the game in Easy mode; the "Normal" mode features screwy water control and other frustration-fueling features. Sure, you can't actually *beat* the game when it's set to easy, but with games out there like *Half-Life* — and hell, even *Gex* — I'd question why you'd even bother in the first place, other than to show off your masochistic tendencies.

All in all, it's painful enough getting through a level of *Glover* without having to worry about a chaotically bouncing rubber ball. Sure, this is a 3D platform game with a funky concept, but the annoying controls and trite gameplay offer little to the PC market, which can't seem to get a good 3D platform game to save its life. If it's *Mario 64*-style action you crave, go buy a Nintendo 64, and let *Glover* sit on its hand.

—*Colin Williamson*

Glover finds himself in a mystical ruin populated by bipedal shark-creatures.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

39%

HIGHS: Colorful graphics; unique (though odd) idea.

LOWS: Sloppy control; playing with the keyboard is simply not an option; senseless concept; drunk camera system.

BOTTOM LINE: It definitely ain't "Glove at first sight." Leave this one on the shelf.

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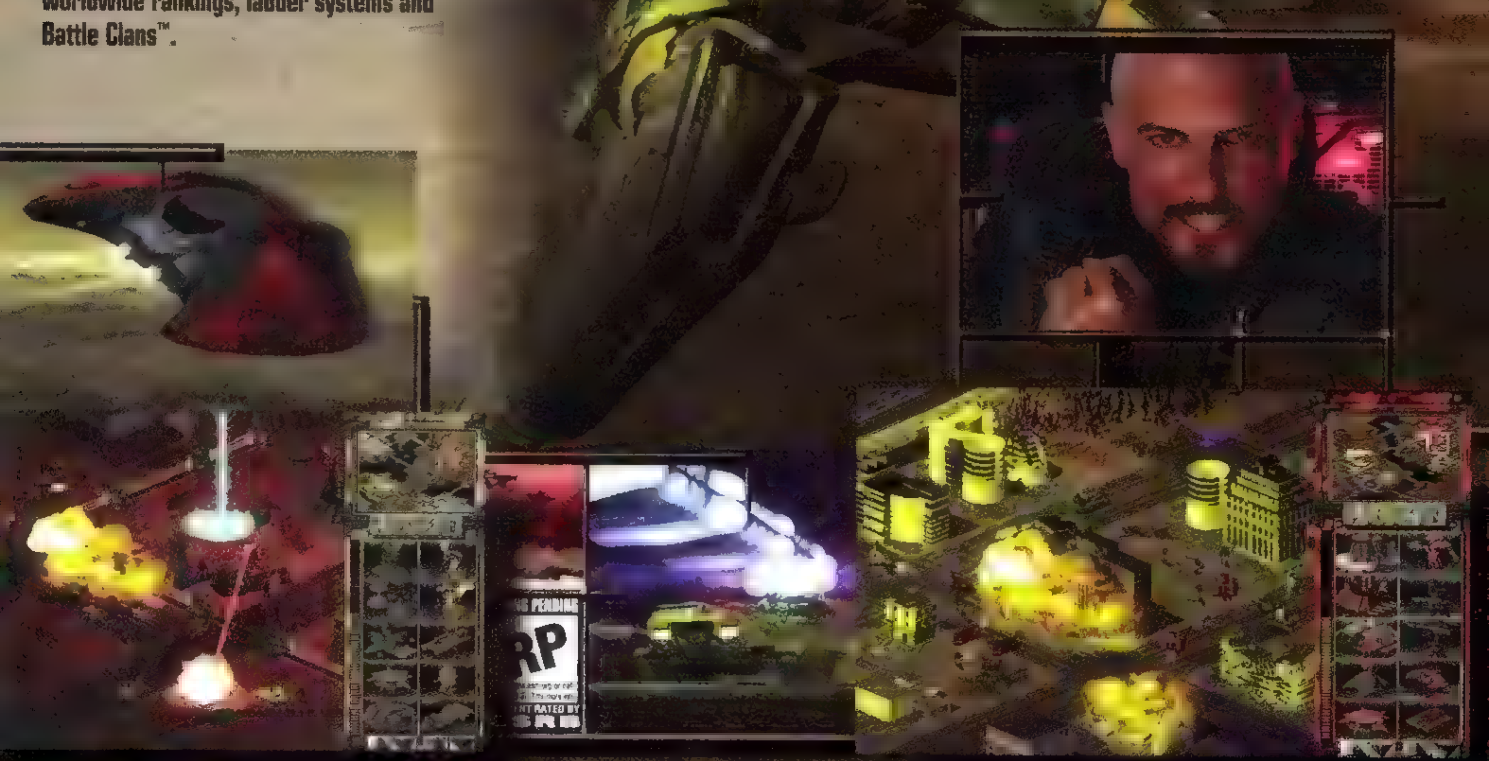

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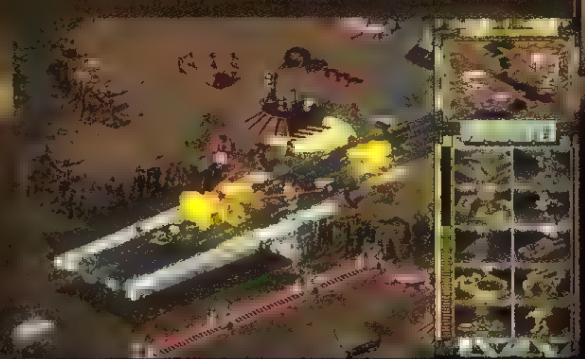

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Viper Racing

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Racing DEVELOPER: Monster Games, Inc. PUBLISHER: Sierra, (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com* REQUIRED: Windows 95/98, Pentium 133; 4x CD-ROM drive; 32MB RAM, 15MB hard drive space WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 200; Direct3D accelerator; 80MB hard drive space, Gamepad or steering wheel MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS: Modem (28.8 or better), Serial Null Modem, IPX, TCP/IP Internet, Maximum players: 8

Here's a title that proves you don't need a showroom full of cars to make a racing game that kicks butt.

When it comes to American made sports cars, the Dodge Viper ranks as one of the most desirable. This high performance machine delivers some 450 horsepower and is guaranteed to turn a few heads out on the street thanks to its sleek and sexy design. Monster Games, Inc., a development group founded by Rich Garcia (formerly of Papyrus), was so enchanted with the Viper that it decided to build an entire game around the car. This myopic focus has allowed MGI to concentrate on getting the feel just right, resulting in a well designed and exciting racing game.

The first thing you'll notice about *Viper Racing* is the clean, crisp graphics of both the cars and the eight tracks, ranging from NASCAR-style ovals to winding road courses through the mountains. Although your best bet is to stay on the pavement, the graphics engine allows you to roam the countryside at will. The engine also provides some of the most wide-open vistas seen in a racing game, with minimal pop-up. The Viper itself is beautifully modeled, with the nice addition of a paint kit that lets you customize your car using a full color palette and 20 design templates. The car also shows the crumpling results of your "interaction" with the scenery and your fellow racers.

There are plenty of options available when hitting the track for a quick race. Three levels of difficulty determine how the car controls and driving aids such as auto shift, braking, and traction control are available. The differences between the lowest and highest realism setting are actually very subtle, and all require some knowledge of how to drive. This may turn off some gamers, but with a little practice, it starts to feel very natural.

Races range from three to 20 laps, and you can race the tracks in either direction. The computer drivers' intelligence can be set to easy, normal, or hard, but even on easy, a couple of the drivers will put up a good fight. The drivers have a tendency toward self-preservation, doing their best to avoid race-ending collisions, so when you inevitably wind up racing against traffic, you'll see the computer cars slamming on their brakes or driving off of the road to avoid you. The AI cars also have been programmed to act "human," meaning they will make mistakes and cause multi car pile-ups, even if you're nowhere in the vicinity.

There's also a nice garage feature, allowing you to tweak your chassis, alignment, gear ratios, and aerodynamics. I found little need to mess with the default settings, but the manual does give you some pointers on how your tinkering will affect your car, and recommends adjustments for each track.

Once you understand the basics, it's time to jump into the career mode. Here's where *Viper Racing* gets really interesting — the goal is to progress through four levels of competition: Amateur, Club, Pro, and GT. As you advance, the more difficult tracks will find their way on to your season schedule, and the number of laps in the races will increase. Depending on how you place, you'll be awarded points and money that can be used to upgrade your car. To move up to the next class, you need to score the most points in a single season. I found the career mode to be nicely balanced. At first, your car is a bit under-powered, but as you earn money for upgrades, you'll become more competitive, all the while learning the tracks and improving your driving skills.

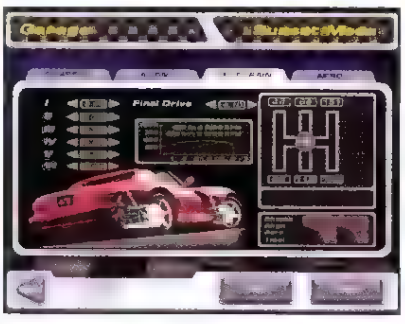
Another nicely implemented feature of *Viper Racing* is the multi-player support. When testing the game over the Internet using a 56K modem, I found the connection incredibly solid. Except for the very infrequent lag issues, it felt just like playing a single-player game, even with the maximum eight cars on the track. After experiencing the slide show like Internet play of racing games like *Need for Speed III*, *Viper* was a breath of fresh air.

I really didn't find much I didn't like about *Viper Racing*. Some minor complaints include the seemingly arbitrary damage system; at times, I've slammed into a wall doing 150+ mph, spun around several times, and then was able to drive off with just some body damage to show for it. Other times, I'd just barely scrape the side of my car against a guardrail, causing me to have to hit the reset button because the car was too damaged to drive. I also would have liked more than eight cars in each race.

If you can live with just having one kind of car to drive and are willing to put a little time into learning the mostly accurate physics model powering the game, *Viper Racing* offers a winning combination of pretty graphics, thrilling racing, and strong multi-player features.

—Rob Smolka

The graphics engine in *Viper Racing* lets you see for miles and miles, making upcoming turns much easier to anticipate.



If you're not happy with your car's performance on the track, head to the garage and perform a little mechanical magic.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

89%

HIGHS: Excellent graphics; smooth Internet play; nice balance between arcade and sim.

LOWS: Curious damage results; only eight cars per race; hope you like driving a Viper!

BOTTOM LINE: All the elements needed to make a quality racer come together beautifully.

http://pc.ign.com

Test Drive Off-Road 2

CATEGORY Racing DEVELOPER Accolade PUBLISHER Accolade, (408) 246 0231, *www.accolade.com* REQUIRED Windows 95 or better, Pentium 133 with a 3Dfx card, or P200 without acceleration, 16MB RAM, DirectX compatible sound and video cards WE RECOMMEND 32MB RAM; 3Dfx card, Joystick or driving wheel MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS LAN only

This four wheel racing game is bogged down in ancient graphics and horrifying handling.

Has anybody sent Accolade a copy of Microsoft's *Monster Truck Madness 2*? It doesn't seem like it, because this sequel to the abysmal *Test Drive Off Road* appears to be competing with the original *MTM* — not that it does a successful job of that. Take a test drive of this silly game, and you'll return it to the dealer as fast as you can.

Off-Road 2's biggest selling point is its on-screen replicas of real vehicles — including, of course, the Hummer. In fact, a glance at the game box almost implies that this title is exclusively a Hummer sim, but it also features other testosterone filled vehicles like Dodge Rams, Jeep Wranglers, and Ford Explorers. You can take your trucks through single races or a world tour multi-race campaign. The tracks run through dirt, mud, snow, and shallow water, each of which predictably affects the handling of your vehicle.

The overall handling is, unfortunately, unpredictable; sometimes you'll catch air off a bump, and other times you'll zip down the other side as if you're magnetized to the ground. Sometimes you can ride over track side hills without affecting your speed, and other times you'll be stopped cold — you never can be sure, because the track's boundaries aren't always well defined. The truck animation is so jittery I had to make sure the graphics really are 3D rendered — I thought I was watching constant snapping between sprites.

Oddly enough, the first-person, in-the-vehicle view is the only view that *doesn't* show the instrument panel. It makes it a bit difficult to know what the heck is going on.

Complicating the quirky control is the very worst force-feedback support I've ever experienced. If you have a force feedback controller, for God sakes, disable it. Whether it's a stick or a wheel, the controller randomly flails either and yon through the whole race. If you can stay on the road with a force feedback controller, you should be a Hollywood stunt driver.

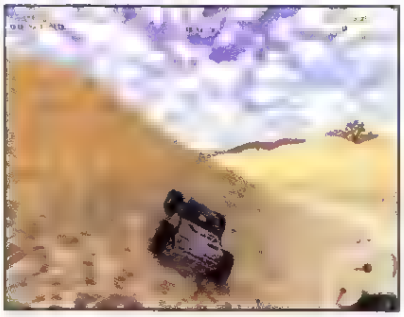
You can't leave the track in *Test Drive — Off-Road 2*. That's probably because the developers didn't want you to see any more terrain graphics than you had to. These visuals date back to the beginning of 3D acceleration, when high resolution SVGA was considered just as good if not better. The proof trees and other ambient roadside obstacles are made up entirely of sprites, but they really don't look out of place!

The whole experience is framed by a totally out of place industrial soundtrack provided by Nine Inch Nails wanna-be bands Sevendust, Gravity Kills, and Fear Factory. It's impossible to make the alterna-pop riffs go away permanently, too. Even if you've set the music to "off," a bug causes the music to start whenever a race does, and again when you're taken back to the menu screens; you have to turn the volume up and back down to zero *each time* to shut it off.

If you want truck racing, go buy *Monster Truck Madness 2*. *Off Road 2* is nothing more than a muddy mess.

Joel Durham Jr.

Track boundaries aren't well defined. Sometimes you can drive over an off-track hill...



...while in other cases, you crash into an invisible barrier that stops you dead.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

27%

HIGHS: My 9-month old son liked the bright colors.

LOWS: No Direct 3D support; horrible driving physics; dated graphics; relentless, out of place soundtrack.

BOTTOM LINE: Somebody please bury this game in the mud.

Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2

PC GAMER EDITORS CHOICE

CATEGORY: Sports DEVELOPER: Ubi Soft PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft, (800) 824-7638, *www.ubisoft.com* REQUIRED: Win 95; 4x CD-ROM drive; Pentium 133; 16 MB RAM; 50MB hard-drive space; Windows-compatible sound card; Mouse; 3Dfx-based 3D accelerator WE RECOMMEND: Pentium II 300, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, Racing wheel and pedals MULTI PLAYER OPTIONS: Modem: 28.8+, SERIAL: 2-4 players, IPX: 2-8 players; TCP/IP: 2-8 players, Max. Players: 8, Spawnable: No, Free Internet Service: *www.ubisoft.com*, Split Screen/Hotseat: Yes

The sequel to the amazing *F1 Racing Simulation* delivers an even better racing experience.

Ubi Soft stunned serious racing sim fans last year by producing what was arguably one of the best Formula 1 games ever: *F1 Racing Simulation*. An initial pass through the sequel, *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2*, may leave you wondering what was changed, but there's actually plenty new and improved about *Monaco 2*.

The original *F1* was a flexible, innovative game with a raft of features; it could be played as an almost arcade-like racing game or as a full-blown simulation with all the modeling and set ups you'd expect from a true sim. It looked good and played even better -- and every aspect of the original game has been tweaked or overhauled for the sequel.

Monaco builds on the original in several key areas: The simulation has been further refined to create an even more authentic experience at the highest realism settings. There are 11 teams and 22 drivers in the game, and the modeling of each feels tighter and more challenging than ever. Weather effects like rain have been improved to provide an even greater challenge. Driver AI (which was tight to begin with) provides a merciless challenge on the hardest setting. New flags (blue, yellow, and red), limitations to the number of "dry" tires a driver can use, the need to make a qualifying time of less than 107 percent of the pole position to race, and replacement cars all add depth to the rules. Enhanced sound and better smoke and fog effects add to the realism.

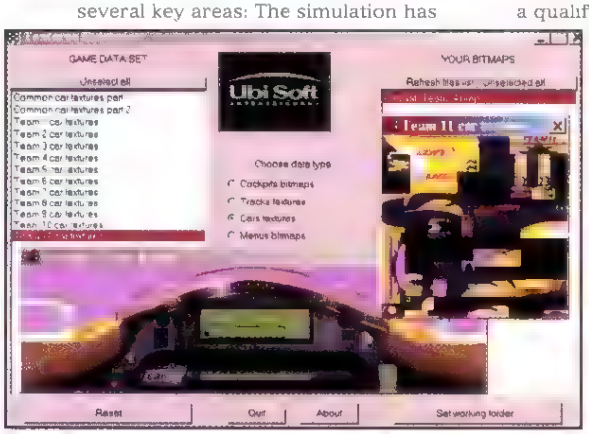
All the usual garage features and settings are here (fuel, steering, tires, downforce, gears, and so on), as well as tire brand selection and pit stop management. Using a special Telemetry feature, you can carefully check the performance of both car and driver at specific moments, getting graphs on information like percentage of braking and acceleration, angle of steering circle, ride height, and camber. Combined with the ability to save circuits and run against recorded "ghost" cars, it provides one of the best race analysis tools to appear in a game.

New editing tools let you modify almost everything: teams, cars, sounds, drivers, paint schemes, cockpits, and track textures. A 1950s style Grand Prix car and race has been added, a la *Grand Prix Legends*, and while the modeling is not quite as refined as Papyrus', most gamers will hardly notice. You can choose to begin a Career, in which you start out as a rookie and must drive any car given to you; if you do well, you can move up the ranks to better cars and teams. Most innovative of all the new play styles are the Scenarios; these are very specific encounters that challenge you to drive under special conditions or meet a set of specific victory requirements. It really adds an interesting twist to the sometimes humdrum driving game experience of endless lapping. Finally, Ubi has added eight-person online support, complete with a free matchmaking service (being tested as we go to press) and qualifying heats.

The changes to *Monaco 2* are sweeping, but the game does feel closer to an enhanced edition than a full-blown sequel. On the other hand, it adds more features than the *Tomb Raider* sequels did, and it has made a great racing game even better.

T. Liam McDonald

The graphics have been improved over *F1 Racing Simulation*, with smoke and fog effects in addition to rain.



Numerous utilities give you a chance to change and tweak *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2* in myriad ways, including this editor that lets you modify paints schemes and cockpits.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

91%

HIGHS: Numerous features and settings will appeal to hardcore simers and newbies.

LOWS: Frame rates drop seriously in a full field of competitors; still no graduated difficulty levels.

BOTTOM LINE: The overall improvements make this one of the best racing games on the market.

http://pc.ign.com

H*E*D*Z

CATEGORY Action DEVELOPER VIS Interactive PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive, (800) 400-1352 *www.hasbro.interactive.com* REQUIRED Win 95, 4x CD-ROM, P166, 16MB, 2MB graphics card WE RECOMMEND 8x CD ROM P233 32MB, 3Dfx-based 3D accelerator MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS Modem TCP/IPX, Serial, Max Players 4

Hasbro made a name for itself a long time ago by making really cool toys, and while its attempts to cross over into the PC gaming market have been met with a mixed response, the company keep plugging along, bolstered by its acquisition of MicroProse. Hasbro's own latest release, *H*E*D*Z* (short for Head Extreme Destruction Zone), is the hardest kind of game to review, because it's neither brilliantly wonderful nor horribly bad. It's just not very much fun.

The story behind *H*E*D*Z* is simple enough: An advanced race of purple aliens likes to collect interchangeable heads — known in the game as "hedz" — and, in doing so, acquire the powers that come with them. The hedz you collect are fairly cute and varied — the policeman head changes your character into a cop on a motorcycle, while another turns you into a mobster armed with a Tommy gun.

*H*E*D*Z* is set on a variety of asteroids and played via a third person perspective. Your goal is simply to progress through various levels collecting hedz, unlocking doors, unraveling jumping puzzles, and collecting power ups. You can

There are several types of hedz powers, including a police officer and a mobster.

carry as many as five hedz at any time. If you lose all your hedz, you're whisked off the asteroid, and your game is over.

Beyond the concept of the hedz themselves, there isn't much creativity here. The levels you fight your way through are extremely bland, with ugly textures and very simple puzzles. Adults will be bored with this game in no time.

And kids won't be too thrilled either. Beyond the simple action of shooting the other aliens, there's little to hold a young gamer's interest. The interface is pretty convoluted, and the fidgety controls will quickly tax the patience of any kid out there (and most adults, as well). It's just too hard to fight an enemy and select a new head and add it to your arsenal, all the while avoiding enemy fire. Also, the other aliens seem to cause you more damage than you cause them, which only adds to the irritation factor.

In the end, *H*E*D*Z* isn't really a game for anyone. Fans of action games will find their time better spent elsewhere, and kids will find just about anything better than this uninspired and boring game.

William Harms

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

24%

HIGHS: Cool hedz powers; imaginative idea for a game.

LOWS: It's not fun to play; graphics are weak; convoluted interface; weak control.

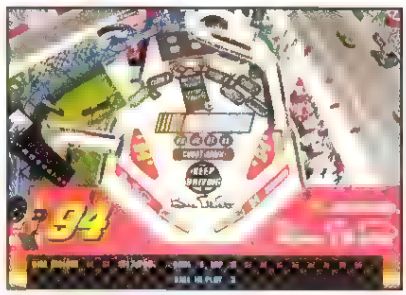
BOTTOM LINE: Despite the original idea, this game just doesn't have much going for it.

3D Ultra NASCAR Pinball

CATEGORY Arcade DEVELOPER Sierra Attractions PUBLISHER Sierra (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com* REQUIRED Windows 95, Quad-speed CD ROM drive, Pentium 90, 16MB RAM, 50MB hard-drive space, Windows 95 compatible sound card, Mouse, Keyboard WE RECOMMEND Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS: Up to 4 players on one machine

Cashing in on the multi-million dollar NASCAR industry, Sierra brings us the strangest-themed pinball game we've seen yet. Sierra offers up the NASCAR theme as a way for you to play as one of four NASCAR drivers: Dale Earnhardt, Bill Elliot, Terry Labonte, or Bobby Labonte. For each driver, you get customized garage, speedway, and pitstop pinball tables that use logos, signatures, and colors to give you the look and feel of the drivers' cars.

After picking your driver, it's off to the track. You start playing on a garage table, where you "customize" your car by sending the silver ball to hit upgrades for parts such as gears, tires, and shocks. Then it's on to a speedway table for your 60-second qualifying lap. The more points you earn, the better your starting position. Then it's time to race. Smack the ball through loops labeled "Turn 1," "Turn 2," etc., and into the NASCAR bumpers to earn bonus points, or play mini-games that involve hitting oil drums, tires, or green flags. Throughout the "race," you have chances to take the lead by hitting the ball into the correct



Ahhh... look at the those pretty graphics. Too bad they don't make the table challenging.

pocket. If you hit your ball through a turn with an accident, you'll be prompted to enter a pitstop table, where you work to change your tires quickly.

Once you're there, you'll probably wish you could stay on the pitstop table longer, just to get some variety. You spend most of your time on the speedway table, and it just isn't that challenging. There aren't many bumpers and ramps, and it's missing most of the clever features that Sierra's other 3D Ultra Pinball games are known for (okay, there's one side table, but it's not much fun). You can play on four NASCAR speedways, but they're all the same table with simple name changes. Where's the fun in that?

And therein lies the problem with *NASCAR Pinball*: the fun is short-lived. The NASCAR theme, cool animations, and gameplay will hold your interest for only so long; pretty soon, you will be dying to "race" on some new, more challenging tracks or to play a good, old fashioned pinball game like *Pro Pinball Timeshock* or Sierra's own *3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night*.

Dean H. Renninger

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

65%

HIGHS: Cool graphics and NASCAR theme; good ball physics.

LOWS: Unchallenging tables; not enough table variety.

BOTTOM LINE: It's an original idea, but the lack of variety means this game won't last long on your hard drive.

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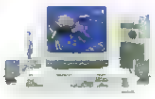

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The Hard Stuff

Good day, and welcome to The Hard Stuff. If you've already read our 3D accelerator roundup in this issue, you know that we've made some significant changes to the suite of programs we use to test systems and video cards. We dropped the tests based on *Duke Nukem 3D*, *X*, and *MDK* — three aging benchmarks that have become less and less useful in evaluating the speed of a new 3D accelerator — and replaced them with Future Corp.'s new Future Mark '99 and a test based on Monolith Productions' *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*. With these new benchmarks added to our existing tests, we'll be able to give you a much clearer picture of which video cards and gaming PCs give you the most bang for your hard-earned bucks.

We've also got the usual assortment of goodies: a new USB joystick from Belkin, a force-feedback racing wheel and a gamepad from Saitek, and a new digital joystick from QuickShot that actually comes in a left-handed model. And just when you thought CD-ROM drives had all but been replaced by DVD-ROMs, Zen Research and Kenwood bring us the fastest CD-ROM drive we've ever seen: a 40-speed drive that really performs like a 40-speed drive! What are you waiting for? Turn the page already!

How We Rate The Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication *Maximum PC*. Between our testing and the BenchMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

PC Gamer Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

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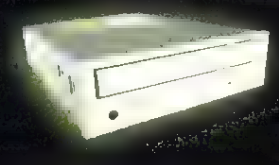

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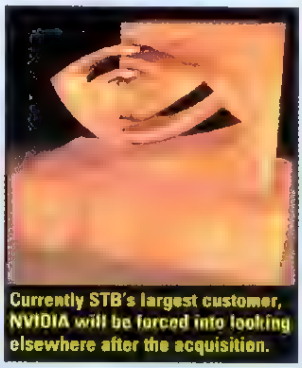
3Dfx to Acquire STB Systems

■ No Voodoo3 for other manufacturers

Less than a month after 3Dfx Interactive announced information on its controversial Voodoo3 3D graphics chipset, the company shocked the industry with the announcement that it is in the process of purchasing STB Systems, a major video card manufacturer, and will make it the sole source of 3Dfx-based boards for system manufacturers and retail customers.

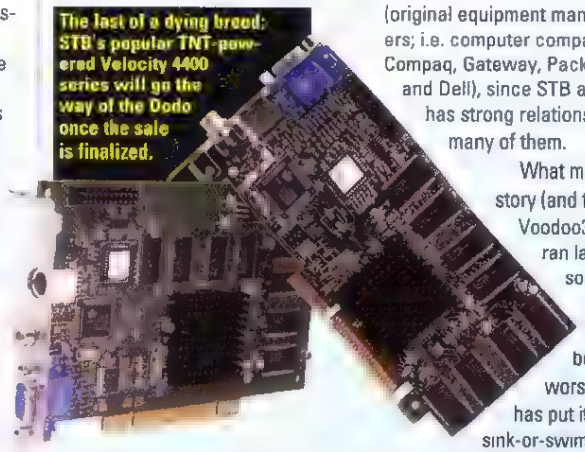
3Dfx says it will continue to support all the other video card makers currently using 3Dfx chipsets like the Voodoo2 and Voodoo Banshee — this includes Diamond Multimedia, Creative Labs, Canopus Corporation, MetaByte, and others — until the end of Voodoo2's and Voodoo Banshee's life cycles. One thing is certain, however: if the sale goes through, STB will be the only board manufacturer producing all future 3Dfx products — including 3D accelerators based on Voodoo3.

According to 3Dfx, this will be a good thing because it will enable the company to "...provide customers with a single source for 3Dfx-branded add-in boards for greater price stability."



Currently STB's largest customer, NVIDIA will be forced into looking elsewhere after the acquisition.

That seems likely, but "price stability" isn't necessarily a good thing for gamers. Since 3Dfx will be the only company selling products based on its future technologies, there certainly will be less price fluctuation — mainly because there will be no competition among manufacturers to drive prices down the way it did with accelerators based on the Voodoo Graphics and Voodoo2 chipsets.



The last of a dying breed: STB's popular TNT-powered Velocity 4400 series will go the way of the Dodo once the sale is finalized.

The move may not be good for 3Dfx's rivals, either, since it undoubtedly means STB won't be using their chips in future products. As we go to press, STB is still the biggest customer for NVIDIA, manufacturers of the RIVA 128 and RIVA TNT chipsets, and STB also has 3D accelerators based on chips from S3 and 3Dlabs. All of these manufacturers stand to be hurt by the acquisition — on the other hand, when companies like Diamond and Creative are shut out of the 3Dfx game, they'll be looking to companies like NVIDIA to take up the slack.

If it's bad news for gamers and other 3D chip makers, it's good news for 3Dfx. It'll put the company in a much better position to provide products to OEMs (original equipment manufacturers; i.e. computer companies like Compaq, Gateway, Packard Bell, and Dell), since STB already has strong relationships with many of them.

What makes this story (and the Voodoo3 story we ran last month) so interesting is that, for better or for worse, 3Dfx has put itself in a sink-or-swim situation. The 3D add-in market that 3Dfx has become so accustomed to dominating is much smaller and much less risky — especially since it was already the leader in that arena.

Acquisition of STB will effectively give 3Dfx complete control of the market for video cards based on its chips, but now all of its eggs are definitely in one basket. And 3Dfx is no longer the only game in town — especially as the number of new 3Dfx-only games dwindles and next-generation chipsets like the RIVA TNT give Voodoo2 a real run for its money. Only time will tell if this move puts 3Dfx on top of the 3D accelerator market — or merely helps it keep its head above water in the face of growing competition.

VOODOO3 SPEC SHEET

If you read The Hard Stuff last month, then you'll recognize these specs to be those of the Voodoo3. For the purpose of explaining why we feel that Voodoo3 is more of an OEM part than a hard-core gamer's dream come true, we thought it would be useful to show them again. Banshee2 anyone?

- Fully integrated 128-bit VGA/2D/3D/video accelerator
- True multi-texturing — 2 textures per clock cycle
- Greater than 7 million triangles/sec. (Voodoo3 3000)
- 4 million triangles/sec. (Voodoo3 2000)
- Greater than 366 million texels/sec. (Voodoo3 3000)
- 250 million texels/sec. (Voodoo3 2000)
- Integrated 350MHz RAMDAC
- 350MHz (Voodoo3 3000) 2048x1536 resolution at 75Hz refresh rate
- 300MHz (Voodoo3 2000) 2048x1536 resolution at 65Hz refresh rate
- 183MHz graphics core (Voodoo3 3000)
- 125MHz graphics core (Voodoo3 2000)
- 3Dfx Voodoo compatibility
- 2X AGP with full sideband support
- DVD acceleration
- Digital LCD Monitor support
- 4MB-16MB SGRAM frame buffer
- DirectX 6, OpenGL, Glide 2.x/3.x support
- .25 Micron technology
- 8.2 million transistors
- Optimized for Pentium II architecture

http://pc.ign.com

Next-Generation PowerVR Nears Completion

Technology nearly identical to Dreamcast

After nearly a year of waiting, NEC is finally putting the finishing touches on its PowerVR Series2 graphics chip. Although no one at NEC will confirm it as we go to press, industry speculation has it that the Series2 — or PowerVR 250 as it is now known — was pushed back so that NEC and VideoLogic could devote as much time as necessary to finalizing Sega's Dreamcast videogame console — a unit that shares nearly identical technology with that of the new PowerVR PC chip.

A longtime goal of NEC and VideoLogic, PowerVR's cross-platform strategy looks to finally be coming to fruition. As we reported back in August, NEC believes that making one graphics chip that can be used in consoles, arcade machines, and PCs will let it reduce the overall cost of developing and manufacturing products through higher volume sales — the end result being that gamers benefit from lower costs.

Now that Dreamcast and its arcade equivalent, "Naomi," are out the door, NEC and VideoLogic have turned to PowerVR 250, and NEC says its performance is even higher than expected. As for real-world benchmarks, look for a review of the PowerVR 250 in The Hard Stuff as soon as it becomes available. According to NEC, that could be as early as April.

POWERVR 250 HIGHLIGHTS:

- Integrated 2D/3D graphics accelerator
- Pentium II and AMD K6-2 3DNOW! optimized
- Supports DirectX 5.0 & 6.0, OpenGL, and PowerSGL Direct
- Support for Windows 95/98, Windows NT 4.0, and Windows 2000
- PCI bus or 2X AGP with side-band addressing
- Support for up to 32MB of RAM
- Integrated 230MHz DAC for resolutions as high as 1600x1500 at 85Hz refresh rate
- Up to 5 million polygons per second
- 200-500 million pixels per second (depending on scene complexity)
- Full triangle & texture setup
- Advanced texturing (Bi-linear, Trilinear, Anisotropic, Bump-mapping)
- True-Color 32-bit pipeline
- Multi-texturing support
- MPEG2 video assist
- Support for standard TV and flat-panel displays

3Dfx-Only Games on a TNT?

It could be a boon to gamers without Voodoo cards, but will 3Dfx let it happen?

A Canadian college student wants you to be able to use any Direct3D-compatible 3D accelerator card to play games that use 3Dfx's proprietary Glide standard — games that would otherwise only work with a 3D card using one of the company's Voodoo family of chips. Naturally, 3Dfx doesn't want to see that happen. The result is a debate over whether or not it's even legal for the college student in question, Khalid Shaikh, to create a Glide-to-Direct3D "wrapper" (a program that takes commands intended for one API and translates them for another).

Back in July, 1998, after hearing that NVIDIA's RIVA TNT was expected to rival the power of 3Dfx's Voodoo2, Shaikh decided it would be interesting to see whether or not he could get Epic Megagames' *Unreal* — a Glide-only game — to work with Direct3D.

Shaikh's problems began once he started posting the source code for his wrapper on his web site. 3Dfx got involved almost immediately, ordering him to remove the offending material and claiming infringement of 3Dfx's licensing agreements. Fearing trouble for his then-employer, Microsoft, Shaikh took the information off his site and stopped work on the wrapper.

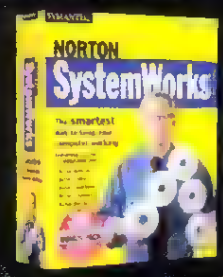
That was the last we heard of it until late December, when Shaikh added a new chapter to his story: he was back in school, he said, no longer working for Microsoft, and therefore "more resilient to the effects of stern E-mail" from 3Dfx. He concluded his update by saying he's keeping an open mind about returning to the project, and that he will do so if he receives enough positive feedback. To learn more about Shaikh and his controversial project, you can check out his web site at *http://www.angelic-coders.com/Kshaikh/Article_GlideWrapper.html*.

Peripheral Visions

The Future of Hardware

USB Connects You and Me

Will wonders never cease? From Belkin Components (*www.belkin.com*) comes what may turn out to be the niftiest use yet for the Universal Serial Bus. The USB Direct Connect battles the hassle of connecting multiple computers for some network gaming; it uses the USB ports on the back of your PC to connect two or more computers for the purpose of sharing programs, files, or even peripheral equipment like printers and scanners. And with its 12MB/sec transfer rate, Belkin's USB Direct Connect is even faster than a full-speed 10Base-T Ethernet connection. Look for a full review in next month's The Hard Stuff.

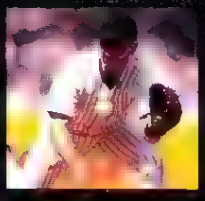


Norton: All in One

Integration is the name of the game with Norton System Works. Symantec (*www.symantec.com*) has bundled four of its most popular computer-saving utility programs into one package and integrated them so they can all be installed at one time, without having to reboot your computer after every program finishes installing. For the first time ever, full versions of Norton AntiVirus, Norton Utilities, Norton CrashGuard, and Norton Web Services are available in one box; so why buy 'em for $40 each when you can have all of them together for $69.99?

PCG

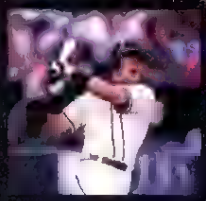
"So I throw this 2 o'clock hitter[1] a

over my leather man's  pancake.[4]

morning journal[6] off at the handle

Hook[8] decides he's going with

deuce[10] - even though I'd collared[11]

Guess[13] don't give  him any black,[14]

and we lose

Don't pull a Merkle[16] Hit our website:
www.highheat.com

(1) a player that hits well in batting practice, but poorly during games. (2) a pitch with nothing on it. (3) an extremely weak hit. (4) a hit eluding the best infielder's tiny glove. (5) a pushover hitter. (6) a bat made with poor wood. (7) a reference to the sultry pop singer's signature 60's song "Is That All There Is?" i.e., is that all there is to the pitch? (see nudist.) (8) a manager with a tendency to pull a pitcher at the first sign of trouble. (9) the most physically unattractive player on any ball club. (10) a first year player with a good curveball. (11) kept him from reaching base safely. (12) a player who rarely makes solid contact. (13) the umpire. (14) corners of home plate. (15) a base-on-balls or a walk. (16) a bone head play.

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nudist[2] and he fists a cripple[3] right

Damn! I'd snapped that cousin's[5] with a Peggy Lee! Well Captain

the ugly head[9] rook' with the

the banjo[12] on deck! Of course, Mr.

so the rook' issues the Annie Oakley[15]

the ballgame."

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ATX Full-Tower Case w/300 Watt PS
(KoolMaxx) Video Cooling System
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PC GAMER CHOICE

"Bottom Line: If you've got the money to spend, this is the gaming system to own"
-PC Gamer, January 1998

EDITORS' CHOICE

"PERFORMANCE WAS SIMPLY STUNNING"
-Computer Gaming World, July 1998

"FAST, PACKED, AND STACKED"
-BOOT Magazine, July 1998

HERCULES

Dynamite TNT

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

COMPANY: Hercules, *www.hercules.com* **PHONE:** (800) 532-0600 *(to order)* **PRICE:** $169 *(m.s.r.p.)*

Hercules catches up to the state of the art with a new TNT-based 3D accelerator.

If a video card company is only as good as its last product, then Hercules' reputation was in need of a little work when we got the Dynamite TNT. After all, the company's Savage 3D-based Terminator Beast card was anything but ferocious, posting some of the lowest scores in OpenGL-accelerated 3D games we've seen from a next-generation graphics accelerator.

So we weren't terribly excited when we received Hercules' Dynamite TNT, a 16MB AGP 2X video card based on NVIDIA's award-winning RIVA TNT chipset. We weren't worried about the TNT chipset, of course — it's proven itself on a whole slew of other manufacturer's boards to be a fast, capable 2D/3D solution. But what could Hercules add with its own TNT-based board, this late in the game? It turns out Hercules found a couple of ways to help the Dynamite TNT stand out from the crowd.

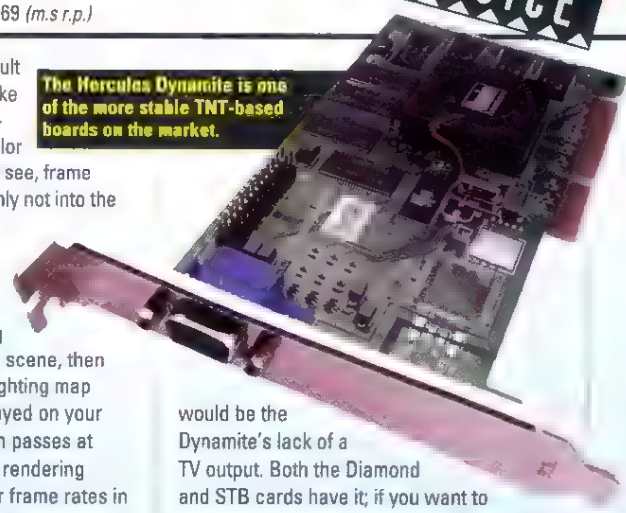
Like all other TNT-based video cards, the Dynamite is capable of rendering 2D and 3D images at resolutions as high as 1900x1200 in true 32-bit color with refresh rates as high as 160Hz (of course, at 1900x1200 the refresh rate maxes at 75Hz — but that's still pretty impressive). TNT-based boards don't support 3D games that use the Glide standard — only 3Dfx-based boards do that — but they do deliver OpenGL and Direct3D performance that approaches that of two Voodoo2 cards linked in Scan-Line Interleave mode. And they do it in true 32-bit color, not just the 16-bit color that 3Dfx-based cards are limited to. The added color depth doesn't seem to result in a big drop in speed, either; take a look at how the Dynamite performed when running in true-color mode in 3DMark 99. As you can see, frame rates did fall off a bit, but certainly not into the realm of the unplayable.

Like the Voodoo2, the TNT is capable of single-pass dual-texturing. What this means is that instead of having to render the texture map for a scene, then going back and rendering its lighting map before the scene can be displayed on your screen, the TNT can make both passes at once, thereby speeding up the rendering process and allowing for faster frame rates in games that support multi-texturing (*Quake II*, *Half-Life*, and other games that use the *Quake II* engine, for instance).

No doubt, the TNT is one heck of a chip, but Hercules is just one of several video card manufacturers using the chipset. So what makes the Hercules Dynamite TNT stand out? The first thing we noticed was the slim little cooling fan that sits atop the TNT chip itself. Both the Diamond Viper V550 (reviewed Dec. 1998) and the STB Velocity 4400 (reviewed Jan 1999) merely come equipped with heat sinks, and since the TNT chip tends to run quite hot, a cooling fan is a nice insurance policy against lock-ups and failures — especially if your computer's case has poor air flow or is packed with other hot-running gadgets.

Not only is the Dynamite stable, it comes equipped with display drivers that allow for more OpenGL and Direct3D rendering adjustments than we've ever seen. Just about every adjustment you can think of (and even a few you probably can't) is easily made from the Advanced section of the Windows Display Properties menu. Many gamers will never tweak all of the Dynamite's settings, but gamers who feel comfortable with experimenting and tinkering will find the Dynamite's drivers to be a true benefit when attempting to squeeze every last drop of performance out of their games.

If there is one feature (or lack thereof) that could potentially lead a gamer to pick another TNT-based card over the Dynamite, it would be the Dynamite's lack of a TV output. Both the Diamond and STB cards have it; if you want to hook your computer up to your TV, you may want to go for one of them. On the other hand, if your TV's no bigger than your monitor, or playing games on your TV isn't important to you, the Hercules Dynamite's reliable, functional, and relatively inexpensive implementation of the TNT makes it well worth a look.



The Hercules Dynamite is one of the more stable TNT-based boards on the market.

BenchMarks

3D Mark
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)
1737 3D Marks

16-bit color:
Game 1 Race: 27.6fps
Game 2 First Person: 30.2fps

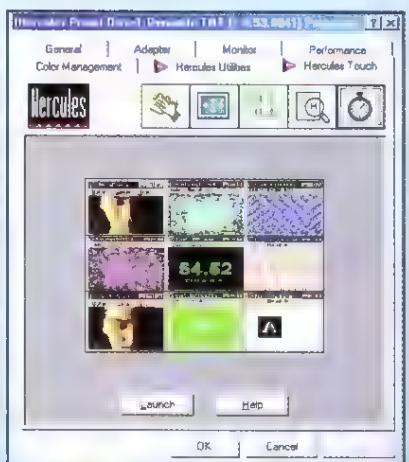
32-bit color:
Game 1 Race: 27.6fps
Game 2 First Person: 30.2fps

Shogo
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)
640x480 – 30.919fps
800x600 – 27.432fps
1024x768 – 21.718fps

Forsaken
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)
640x480 – 111.52fps
800x600 – 98.48fps
1024x768 – 69.43fps

Quake II
(TESTS OPENGL PERFORMANCE)
640x480 – 54.4fps
800x600 – 51.3fps
1024x768 – 37.7fps

Quake
(TESTS OPENGL PERFORMANCE)
640x480 – 28.9fps



Hercules spent a lot of time making sure that the user could get as much power as possible out of the Dynamite TNT. To that end, there's even a 2D benchmark program called Speedy integrated into the Display Properties.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: It's a TNT board; very stable; full-featured drivers; least expensive retail TNT we've tested; slim cooling fan is a nice insurance policy against lock-ups and failures.

LOWS: No TV output, but that may not be a factor for some gamers.

BOTTOM LINE: With the Dynamite TNT, Hercules takes a big step in the right direction.

SAITEK

R4 Force Feedback Wheel

COMPANY: Saitek, *www.saitek.com* **PHONE:** (310) 212-5412 *(to order and for tech support)* **PRICE:** $199.95 *(m.s.r.p.)*

It's hard to understand why, but it's rare for companies that make racing wheels and pedals to get both components right. Then again, we've found that it's also rare for Saitek to make a controller that's anything but well-rounded, and the R4 Force Wheel is no exception.

Based on the same technology that drives Microsoft's SideWinder Force Feedback Wheel, the R4 is a great controller with or without the feedback enabled. From its sleek look to its irresistible grip, this wheel ranks among the best of the current lot.

The R4 clamps firmly onto any desk or table; it even works with those desks that have a little lip hanging down in front. The wheel's odd, rectangular shape feels a bit awkward at first — especially since it turns through a fairly wide arc — but we got used to it within minutes of starting a race.

The controller's six buttons are all conveniently located; two are on the wheel's hub, comfortably within thumb-range; another two are the forward and backward positions of a little shifter stick on the right-hand side of the wheel; and two more take the form of paddles located behind the wheel and toggled with your fingertips. A nice layout.

Saitek's R4 Force Feedback racing wheel and pedal combo is built on the same technology as Microsoft's SideWinder wheel, but it has a slicker design and a few extras.

And the pedals? Not only are they stable, but their tension is adjustable (albeit subtly) with the use of a little hex wrench that stows away in the wheel's base. Saitek's driver software lets you choose between letting the pedals use a single traditional joystick axis or two independent axes (which lets you apply gas and brakes at the same time in games that support this more realistic configuration).

The force feedback effects are well done and deliver realistic jerks and vibrations in games like *Need for Speed III* and *Ultim@te Race Pro*. Our one gripe is that, because it has virtually the same guts as the Microsoft wheel, the R4 shares the Sidewinder's tendency to rattle loosely when held near the middle of its turning radius — possibly a result of the internal gears having a bit too much play. It wasn't a huge problem for us, but your mileage may vary.

Aside from the minor complaints above, the only problem with this wheel is its rather high price — but if you've got the extra cash, you won't be disappointed.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Excellent force feedback feel and great design make this wheel a winner; great locking clamp system; buttons are comfortably placed on the wheel.

LOWS: High price; odd shape.

BOTTOM LINE: With the excellent R4 Force Feedback wheel, Saitek continues to build its strong reputation.

QUICKSHOT

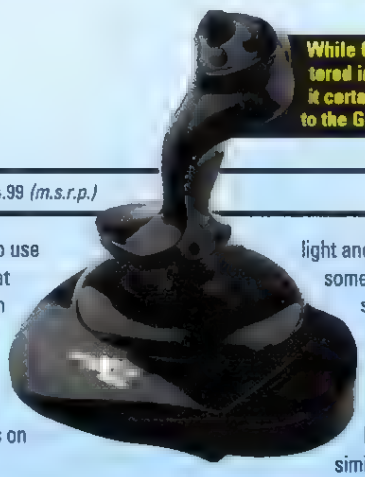
GenX 500L

While QuickShot may have faltered in the reliability department, it certainly splurged when it came to the GenX 500L's appearance.

COMPANY: QuickShot, *www.quickshot.com* **PHONE:** (408) 263-4163 *(to order)* **PRICE:** $34.99 *(m.s.r.p.)*

It's a matter of history that left-handed people have always been given the shaft. In medieval times, they were denounced by the church as heretics and burned at the stake. Fortunately, we live in more enlightened times today — indeed, science has demonstrated that southpaws are often more mentally adept than "regular" folks (Aristotle, Leonardo Da Vinci, Picasso, Beethoven, Einstein, Mark Twain, Sir Isaac Newton, and Jimi Hendrix were all lefties), but for the most part they're still doomed to a life of ink-smudged palms, wrestling with can openers...and struggling to find a usable joystick.

In the early days of PC gaming, things were simpler. Joysticks conformed to a simple, symmetrical (and admittedly somewhat bland) design that fit adequately into either hand. As gaming became more popular and the need for better peripherals grew, manufacturers responded with sophisticated sticks whose sexy curves, myriad buttons, and ergonomically molded shafts have relegated old-school controllers to the bargain bin of history. The problem with this new breed of slick sticks is that, while they fit oh-so-snugly into the right hand, they're virtually impossible to use with the left. The result is that southpaw gamers have been left behind to struggle with outdated, ambidextrous sticks while their right-handed brethren have their pick of the best new devices on the market.



Props to QuickShot, then, for releasing the first stick made exclusively for left-handers. The GenX 500L is essentially a mirror image of the GenX500, the "normal" right-handed version, so the forgotten 11 percent can finally experience the joy of wrapping their good hand around an ergonomic controller. The 500L is a capable device sporting four buttons, a hat switch, a twist axis for rudder control, and a throttle slider (to the right of the stick, natch). Its basic functions work well enough, and movement feels good. And it has a weighted base, which anchors the device firmly to your gaming surface.

It's not without its problems. The hat switch refused to respond during the standard calibration and setup process; the throttle feels light and flimsy, and — most worrisome of all — the primary button stopped responding after just a few hours' play. We switched to another 500L which has since worked fine, but our two right-handed GenX 500s have had similar problems, so there's cause to wonder how reliable these sticks are.

Even with those problems, southpawed gamers may still want to check out the GenX 500L simply because it's the only high-end stick made for the left hand. But you'll want to hold onto that warranty card in case it goes kaput.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

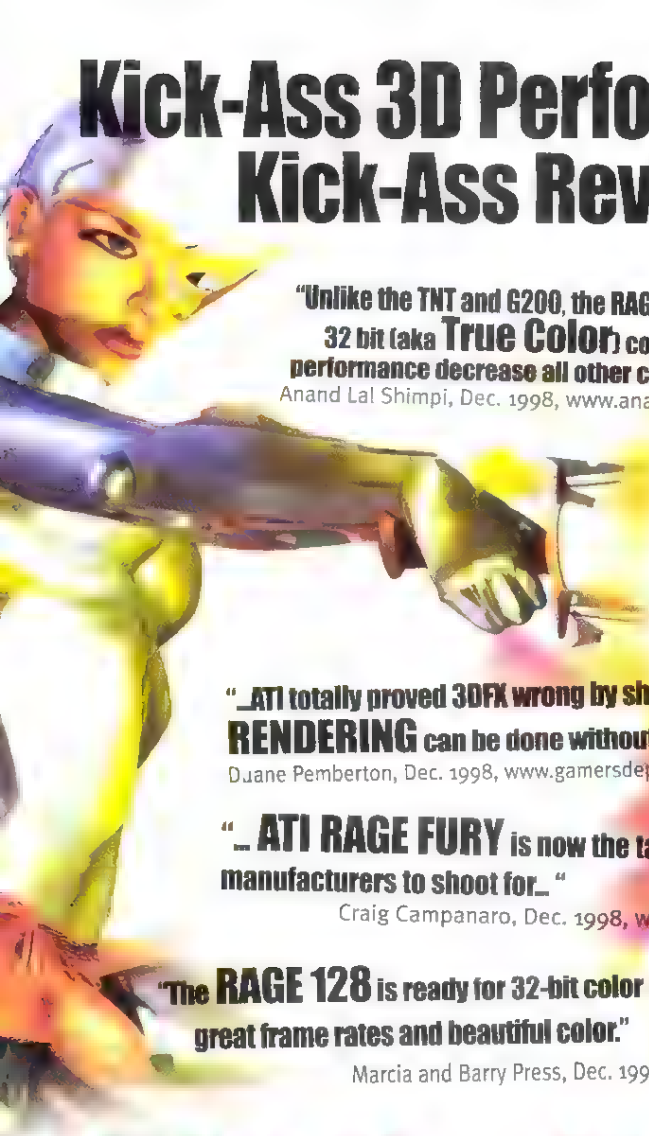
HIGHS: Fits snugly into the left hand, making it the only dedicated high-end choice for southpaws; solid, weighted base.

LOWS: Problems with hat; trigger "died" after just a day of gaming; lame throttle control.

BOTTOM LINE: Left-handed gamers finally have a stick to call their own, but it's marred by some significant reliability problems.

http://pc.ign.com

Kick-Ass 3D Performance = Kick-Ass Reviews

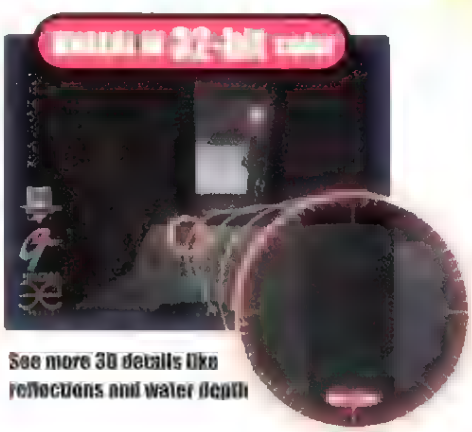


"Unlike the TNT and G200, the RAGE 128 can render at 32 bit (aka **True Color**) color depths without the 20-50% performance decrease all other chipsets come with."
Anand Lal Shimpi, Dec. 1998, www.anandtech.com

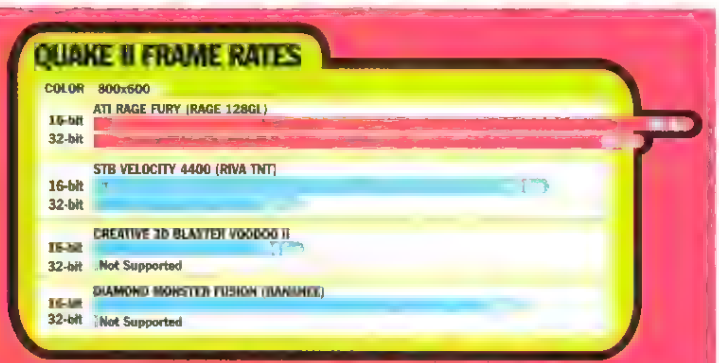
"...ATI totally proved 3DFX wrong by showing **32 BIT RENDERING** can be done without a performance hit..."
Duane Pemberton, Dec. 1998, www.gamersdepot.com

"... **ATI RAGE FURY** is now the target for other manufacturers to shoot for..."
Craig Campanaro, Dec. 1998, www.sharkyextreme.com

"The **RAGE 128** is ready for 32-bit color now, delivering great frame rates and beautiful color."
Marcia and Barry Press, Dec. 1998, www.avault.com



See more 3D details like reflections and water depth



GRAPHICS BY ATI rage 128

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Quake II Frame Rates: All tests run using Quake II v3.19. All tests were done on a P2 450MHz system with 64MB RAM, Windows 98, DirectX 6.0, ATI RAGE FURY, STB Velocity 4400, Creative 3D Blaster Voodoo2 and Diamond Monster Fusion were tested using drivers 4.11.6031, 4.10.01.2404, 0.37, 4.00.0094, 2.16, 4.10.01.0206 respectively.

Go to http://pcgamer.ign.com/request Product #013

SAITEK

Cyborg 3D Digital Pad

COMPANY: Saitek, *www.saitek.com* **PHONE:** (410) 568-2390 *(to order)* **PRICE:** $49 95 *(m.s.r.p.)*

Saitek unleashes the second entry in its Cyborg 3D line — a gamepad for all seasons.

Finding the right gamepad can be difficult. Do you go with the ubiquitous Microsoft Sidewinder or a Gravis gamepad, or do you go out on a limb and pick a pad that's completely unlike anything else? If you're feeling adventurous, give Saitek's new all-things-to-everyone gamepad a try.

For sheer number of features, the Cyborg 3D Digital Pad can't be beat. A mini joystick handles the X and Y axis, providing a full range of analog joystick-style movement; a separate directional pad functions as either a traditional 4- or 8-way thumb pad or a flightstick-style "hat" switch; a throttle slider is on the right-hand side; and a ring that rotates around the directional pad acts as a rudder control. On the underside of the pad are four buttons: two paddles and two push buttons that sit just about where your index fingers rest. Two more buttons are worked into the grip and rest just under your pinkie on each side. And arranged around the directional pad and mini-joystick are six more buttons, for a grand total of 12.

In the spirit of completeness, the Cyborg pad also has a switch for turbo and auto fire. The turbo fire setting allows the user to hold a button for continuous fire while the auto fire button fires automatically whether the fire button is held or not.

In the spirit of its goal to be the one pad for all gamers, the Cyborg 3D Pad has a switch that lets it function in one of three different modes: Flying, Driving, and Arcade. In Flying mode, all the axes are available, and the buttons can be programmed via the Saitek Command Center software; the mini-joystick acts as your flight stick and the ring around the directional pad is your rudder. In Driving mode, the mini-joystick handles the X axis for throttle and braking control, while the ring controls the Y axis for steering. The Arcade mode makes the Cyborg 3D behave as a traditional gamepad, disabling the mini-joystick and rotating ring and using the thumb pad as a 4- or 8-way digital controller. Unfortunately, in both Drive and Arcade mode, the Cyborg 3D can't be programmed via the Command Center software.

Like Saitek's Cyborg 3D joystick, the new gamepad boasts a certain degree of physical customizability. The Cyborg 3D Pad has rubber hand-rests on each that can be removed and repositioned up and down to accommodate different-sized hands.

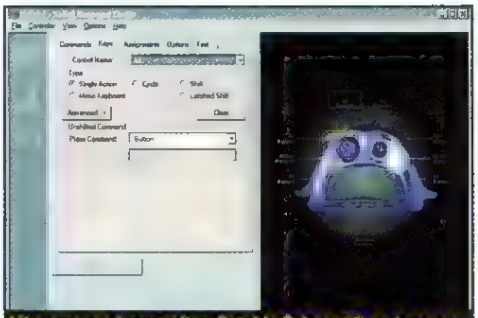
Configuring the Cyborg 3D Pad is easy.

The Cyborg 3D Digital Pad may look menacing, but it's actually very comfortable to hold.

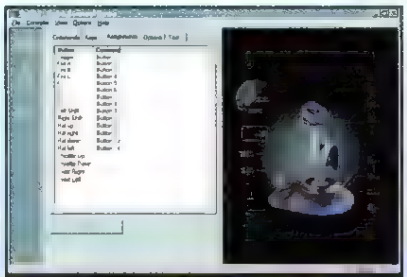
The Command Center programming software is a cinch to use, allowing the user to quickly assign keyboard commands to buttons.

Like most Saitek products, the Cyborg 3D pad is solidly constructed with quality components. The mini-joystick and rotating ring auto-center quickly and offer a good level of resistance while still being easy to control. The buttons all lie within easy reach and provide a solid tactile response when they're pressed.

The Cyborg 3D Digital Pad offers every widget a gamer could want, and manages to deliver exceptional control, easy customizability and friendly software; in terms of flexibility, it gives the Gravis Xterminator a run for its money. It's heavy enough to feel solid in your hands, but still comfortable enough for extended gaming sessions.



Like any good controller, Saitek's Cyborg 3D pad comes with a handy programming utility; Command Center makes programming the pad a breeze.



As a way of making life easier, Saitek has unified its Command Center software to work with all of its newest controllers — including the Cyborg 3D Stick.

The different control modes also make it a good all-purpose pad for action games, racing sims, and sports games. Will it replace your mouse and keyboard for playing first-person shooter games, though? Not likely. As versatile as the Cyborg Pad is, it's still no substitute for a fancy new USB mouse and standard keyboard. While this news probably doesn't come as a shock to any of you, it's important to point out nevertheless.

In spite of the drawbacks, if you're wanting something different, this pad is definitely worth a look.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Lots of control options and 12 programmable buttons; sturdy design; customizable for different hand sizes.

LOWS: No programmability in two of its three game modes; switching between play modes requires recalibration.

BOTTOM LINE: A very good gamepad bristling with useful features.

http://pc.ign.com

BELKIN

HawkEye Pro

COMPANY: Belkin, *www.belkin.com* **PHONE:** (800) 223-5546 *(to order)* **PRICE:** $39.99 *(m.s.r.p.)*

It's not just a bad joystick, it's a bad USB joystick!

With every new technology comes a steady stream of new products; now that the Universal Serial Bus is finally catching on, it's no different. Speakers, scanners, keyboards, cameras, and a plethora of other gizmos that plug into the USB port are now appearing on store shelves. And, of course, so are USB game controllers.

Unfortunately, new technology doesn't always lead to good products; there's always a certain percentage of inferior products whose only real selling point is simply that they're based on that new technology. Belkin's HawkEye Pro is a good example.

The HawkEye Pro is a four-button joystick with a hat switch and a throttle wheel. Installing it couldn't be much easier; once it's plugged into your PC's USB port, Windows 98 detects it and installs its own driver. That's all there is to it. It definitely lives up to the plug-and-play promise of USB; it's everything else about it that's inferior.

For starters, the stick itself has too wide a range of motion; using it in any game that requires frequent changes in direction is a lot like work. Two of the buttons are conveniently placed on the handle, but the other two are set too close together and are hard to distinguish by feel — you'll find yourself frequently pressing the wrong one. The hat switch feels mushy, and it tends to get stuck in the down position.

The best feature is the throttle wheel, which has a nifty clutch that causes it to click when it's moved upward and move smoothly upon its return. Unfortunately, it's also mounted flush with the base, so it can be hard to find without taking your eyes off the game you're playing.

Belkin makes excellent cables, power strips, and networking equipment, but it looks like the company isn't prepared to put the same effort into its game controllers. If you're looking to move to a USB controller, there are already better USB-compatible sticks on the market, and even more are on the way.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: It's a USB controller, and the "plug-and-play" with Windows 98 really works.

LOWS: That's not enough to sell it. Everything else about this stick is substandard; it has too wide a range of motion and inconvenient buttons.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got your heart set on a USB joystick, take a look at version 2.0 of Microsoft's SideWinder Precision Pro.

KENWOOD

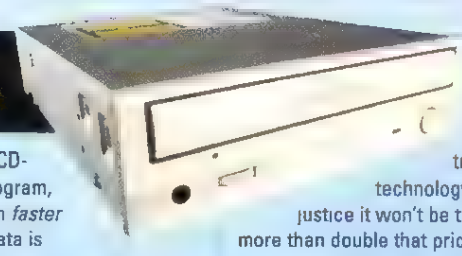
Multi Beam 40x Plus

COMPANY: Kenwood (Distributed by Hi-Val), *www.kenwood.com; www.hival.com* **PHONE:** (888) 730-4206 *(to order)* **PRICE:** $199 *(m.s.r.p.)*

The "X" rating of a typical CD-ROM drive is a bit misleading: it doesn't indicate average performance, but a best-case scenario. You might expect a 32X drive, for example, to read data 32 times faster than an old, single-speed drive, but in reality it only does that while reading the outermost portion of a CD-ROM disc. Unfortunately, CD-ROMs are written from the inner tracks outward, and many of them aren't full — so most CD-ROM drives that claim speeds of 24X or faster actually read data at an average speed of 12 to 16 times the rate of a single-speed drive.

Enter Zen Research and its TrueX Technology. CD-ROM drives blessed with this amazing new technology read seven tracks at once — instead of one, as per standard drives — which allows them to read much greater amounts of data while spinning the disc at a fixed rate. The result: these drives read data at their actual "X" rating, and yet they don't spin nearly as fast as other high-speed drives.

The performance of the TrueX-equipped Kenwood Multi Beam 40x Plus is


Our CD-ROM benchmarking program rated this drive even faster than its label claims!

startling. CD Tach, our CD-ROM benchmarking program, rated it at 42.5X — even *faster* than its label claims! Data is blasted through the IDE bus at better than 6MB per second; a 32X drive is lucky to average 2.5MBps. All the while, the drive spins at a relatively low and steady 3,000 RPM, which makes it a lot quieter than other drives.

In-game performance is simply amazing. Load times for games that transfer level data from their CDs — which most games do — are cut wonderfully short. The urge to go and get a cup of coffee while waiting for the next level to load is happily eliminated. The performance increase has other, more subtle benefits, too: that annoying pause during the CD-ROM seek, often experienced after opening up Windows Explorer, is all but gone. Games install much faster than they could with a 32X drive.

The Kenwood Multi Beam 40X Plus is the first CD-ROM drive to feature Zen's incredible technology, and if there's any justice it won't be the last. Its cost is more than double that price of an average high-speed CD-ROM drive, but it's justified: the average performance is three to four times faster. With DVD technology poking along at its current pace, this drive isn't likely to be outdated any time soon. If you're ready for a CD-ROM drive upgrade, look no further.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: True 40X performance — and faster (even faster than its label claims); low spin rate affords quiet operation.

LOWS: Relatively high price.

BOTTOM LINE: Quite simply, TrueX is the biggest advancement in CD-ROM technology since the drives were first introduced, and it isn't likely to be outdated any time soon.

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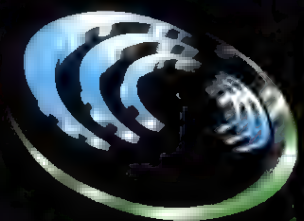

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Intel Pentium II 450MHz MMX 512KB Cache
256MB PC100 SDRAM
9.1GB Seagate Barracuda Ultra2 6CSI 8ms Hard drive
40X Plextor UltraPlex 40Max Ultra2 SCSI CD-ROM
Asus P2B-LS 440BX mainboard with built-in Ultra2 SCSI and Intel 10/100 Ethernet card
100MB Iomega internal Zip drive
Dual CPU Cooling Fan
Dual HD Cooling Fan
Digital PC Temperature Monitor & Fan
2 Case Cooling Fans
16MB Canopus Spectra 2500 Riva TNT with TV-out and Fan
24MB Quantum3D ObsidianX24 Voodoo2
Sound Blaster Live! with Digital I/O
Cambridge DeskTop Theater 5.1 speakers with subwoofer
US Robotics 56K V.90 modem
3.5" Floppy drive
ATX Super Mid Tower case with swing-open doors for easy access to chassis
Microsoft Elite Natural keyboard
Logitech MouseMan+
Logitech WingMan Force stick
Logitech Formula Force wheel with pedals
Microsoft Windows 98 CD and Manual
Free Games, System Recovery Disk
3 year parts, 1 year labor warranty

$ 3,999

Millenium Red Line

Intel Pentium II 450MHz MMX 512KB Cache
128MB PC100 SDRAM
14.4GB IBM DeskStar 9.5ms Hard drive
5X Sony DVD-ROM with DVD/MPEG-2 card
Abit BH6 440BX 5PCI/2ISA/1AGP mainboard
100MB Iomega internal Zip drive
Dual CPU Cooling Fan
Digital PC Temperature Monitor & Fan
2 Case Cooling Fans
16MB STB Velocity 4400 Riva TNT with TV-out
12MB Diamond Monster 3D II Voodoo2
Sound Blaster Live! with Digital I/O
Cambridge Four Point Surround speakers with subwoofer
US Robotics 56K V.90 modem
3.5" Floppy drive
ATX Super Mid Tower case with swing-open doors for easy access to chassis
Microsoft Elite Natural keyboard
Logitech FirstMouse +
Logitech WingMan Force stick
Saitek Cyborg 3D Digital pad
Microsoft Windows 98 CD and Manual
Free Games, System Recovery Disk
3 year parts, 1 year labor warranty

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Millenium Form

Intel Pentium II 400MHz MMX 512KB Cach
64MB PC100 SDRAM
8.6GB Seagate Medalist 10.5ms Hard drive
32X Toshiba 85ms CD-ROM
Abit BH6 440BX 5PCI/2ISA/1AGP mainboa
Dual CPU Cooling Fan
2 Case Cooling Fans
16MB Diamond Viper V550 Riva TNT with TV-out
8MB Diamond Monster 3D II Voodoo2
Sound Blaster Live! value
Cambridge Four Point Surround speakers with subwoofer
US Robotics 56K V.90 modem
3.5" Floppy drive
ATX Super Mid Tower case with swing-ope doors for easy access to chassis
Logitech Deluxe104 keyboard
Logitech FirstMouse+
Saitek Cyborg 3D Digital pad
Microsoft Windows 98 CD and Manual
Free Games, System Recovery Disk
3 year parts, 1 year labor warranty

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$1,209 21" Sony 500PS .25 1600x1200
$ 959 21" ViewSonic G810 .25dpi 1600x1280
$ 579 19" Hitachi SuperScan Elite751 .22dp 1600x1200
$ 499 19" ViewSonic/Optiquest V95 .26dpi 1600x1280
$ 349 17" ViewSonic/Optiquest V75 .26dpi 1600x1200
$ 299 17" ViewSonic/Optiquest V73 .26dpi 1280x1024
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OPTICAL COMPUTER SYSTEMS

The Hard Stuff Sideways Page

WE REVIEW SO MUCH HARD STUFF EVERY MONTH, it can be hard to keep track of what's hot and what's not. On this page, we dare to compare hardware we've reviewed. In fact, there's so much data, we had to turn the page sideways to make it all fit! This month: speakers!

SPEAKERS	ISSUE REVIEWED	PRICE WHEN REVIEWED	SUBWOOFER?	CONTROLS	LOCATION OF CONTROLS	HEADPHONE JACK?	MISC. FEATURES	COMMENTS
SSI MTS 100	November '97	$179.99	Yes	V, S, B, more	Subwoofer	Yes	5-speaker + subwoofer, Dolby Pro Logic decoder.	A lot for the price, but below average sound and power.
Platinum Sound SRS 2000	November '97	$179	Yes	V, B, more	Subwoofer	No	SRS circuit.	Hollow, muffled sound. Weak.
Altec ACS48	November '97	$140.00	Yes	V, B	Satellite	Yes	No knobs, control is digi...	Excellent sound, but digital control is annoying.
Labtec LCS-2408	December '97	$59.99	That's all it is.	V, B	Subwoofer	No	This is a universal subwoofer.	Poor bass for a subwoofer. Poorly shielded, considering it's meant to sit next to monitor.
Laral Unwired Stereo IR 1000	December '97	$99.99	N/A	V	Ear piece	Yes	This is a set of wireless headphones.	Great sound; wireless convenience; clean IR transmission.
GNT Electronic GNT-5000	January '98	$54.95	Yes	V, S, T	Subwoofer	No	—	Decent sound for the money; light on the mid-range.
QuickShot Sound Force 680	March '98	$99.99	No	V, B, T, 3D	Satellite	Yes	QSound.	Good bass for a system without a subwoofer. QSound really makes the sound jump out.
Cyber Acoustics MMS-6	April '98	$99	No	V, T, B	Satellite	Yes	—	Weak bass and mid-range; satellite too light for push button controls (speaker slides back).
Mediaphile Presentation Audio System	May '98	$249.99	Yes	V	Separate unit	No		A typical gaming setup isn't an ideal place for these speakers.
S2/Midiland 4100	June '98	$300	Yes	V, B, T, 3D	Separate unit	Yes	3DSP - MidiLand's proprietary stereo expander.	Great sounding, powerful speakers that may blow away your stereo system in more ways than one.
Altec ADA305 USB Speakers FourPoint- Surround	October '98	$199	Yes	V, S, 3D	Satellite	No	Proprietary surround sound.	Not a true USB implementation; better speakers are available for the same price.
Cambridge SoundWorks	October '98	$99.99	Yes	V, S	Separate unit	No	—	One of the few (and best) four point speaker systems.
Monsoon MM-1000	November '98	$229	Yes	V, T, B	Separate unit	No	Flat panel speakers.	Not the worst set of speakers on the block, but for the money, you can do better.
Logitech SoundMan Extreme	November '98	$129	Yes	V, T, S	Satellite	No	—	One of the best sets of speakers in this price range.
MidiLand Forzando Plus	November '98	$199.99	Yes	V, S, 3D	Satellite	No	Proprietary 3D sound.	Speakers that are a cut above the norm, but don't scream quality.
Advent AV390	December '98	$179	Yes	V, S, T, B, 3D	Satellite	Yes	—	Very nice sounding speakers with excellent bass response.
Microsoft Sound System 80	December '98	$199	Yes	V, S, T	Satellite	No	True USB Speakers.	Excellent speakers that might be a bit out of a gamer's price range.
Cambridge SoundWorks Desktop Theater 5.1	January '98	$299	Yes	V, S, T, more	Separate unit	No	Dolby Digital and Dolby Surround playback.	The best current multi-speaker solution for games and movies on your PC.

SPEAKERS KEY

Controls: V=volume, B=bass, T=treble, S=subwoofer level, 3D=3D circuit • *Location of controls*: The subwoofer level, if there is one, is usually on the subwoofer and is not intended for frequent adjustment. The other controls should be on a satellite or separate unit; if they're on the subwoofer, it's inconvenient. *Price When Reviewed*: All prices are MSRP.

Tech Q&A

USB: Once known as the useless serial bus, it's finally picking up steam; but can you set up a network with it?

Q I recently put together my new computer using a Tyan Trinity S1590S 100 AT motherboard. It's running great, except for one problem: the video card is somehow conflicting with the PCI-to-PCI Bridge. When I go into my Windows Device Manger and look under the properties for my video card (a Diamond Viper V330 AGP with 4MB SGRAM), it lists the following conflicts under the Resources tab:

MEMORY RANGE E4000000 - E4FFFFFF USED BY: PCI STANDARD PCI-TO-PCI BRIDGE

MEMORY RANGE E6000000 - E6FFFFFF USED BY: PCI STANDARD PCI-TO-PCI BRIDGE

And, as you'd expect, here's the message that comes up under the PCI Standard PCI-to-PCI bridge Resources tab:

MEMORY RANGE E4000000 - E5FFFFFF USED BY: DIAMOND VIPER V330

MEMORY RANGE E6000000 - E6FFFFFF USED BY: DIAMOND VIPER V330

I have installed the OSR 2.1 update to Windows 95, the latest VIA AGP driver, and the newest video card driver, but the conflict still remains. When I attempted to change the memory range of either the V330 or the PCI-to-PCI bridge, the display driver became inoperable and would go no higher than 640x480x16 (not 16-bit color — 16 colors). What's going on here, and why can't I resolve this conflict?

—Scott H., via the Internet

A If you ask us, you don't need to change a thing. The conflict message you're seeing is actually a known bug within Windows 95 and shouldn't get in the way of your AGP card's functionality in the least. When and if you upgrade to Win 98, you'll see this "conflict" disappear. Until then, simply ignore it.

Q In part of your answer to Mr. Pascal's question in December's Q&A, you said that he could change his bus speed to 75MHz or 83MHz. This can be dangerous even if he doesn't change the processor's speed. For example: A 66MHz bus with a 4.5 multiplier and a 75MHz bus with a multiplier of 4 will both equal 300MHz; but the 75MHz and 83MHz settings can cause some weird things to happen on the PCI bus, which normally runs at 33MHz. It will run at 37.5MHz at the 75MHz setting and 41.5MHz at the 83MHz setting. While this usually isn't a problem, it can cause certain PCI cards to behave oddly, lock up, or even burn out. Also, memory errors and disk errors can occur at these speeds.

One last thing: Most 300MHz Pentium II processors will not run at 350MHz due to the speed of the onboard Level 2 cache. If you disable the cache, you may be able to run at 400MHz, but you'll have to watch out for heat. This holiday season, be sure to gather round the flaming Pentium II!

—Ryan Power, via the Internet

A This is exactly why we don't recommend overclocking for everyone. All sorts of screwy things can happen — if you don't fry your processor, you might still end up with a malfunctioning PCI device. As always, if you're contemplating overclocking and are the least bit apprehensive — don't do it! If you damage any components in your system, you'll only have yourself to blame — and your own money to spend on new parts, since overclocking naturally voids any manufacturer's warranties.

Q Hey there, *PC Gamer*, I have a couple of questions for you:

1. Is it possible to connect two computers via USB (sort of like a serial cable connection)? Since USB functions at 12Mbps, it should be plenty fast for games, right?

2. I know a guy with a dual 450MHz Intel Pentium II Xeon-based system. Would his set up yield better gaming performance than dual 450MHz PIIs (non-Xeon)? If so, why don't manufacturers use them in high-end systems (e.g., Falcon NorthWest, AlienWare, etc.)?

—Kurt, via the Internet

A 1. Yes, it is indeed possible to create a direct cable connection with USB. Although we received the product too late in the month to include a review in this issue, Belkin Components recently sent us a small kit that allows exactly the type of connection you speak of. The product is called USB Direct Connect and allows as many as eight computers to be networked via USB. Based on how simple the setup looks, we're very excited to test it out. Look for a review in next month's Hard Stuff section.

The USB Direct Connect could make networking PCs easier than it ever has ever been.

Need Help?

If you have a hardware question or comment, write to us at:

Greg Vederman, The Hard Stuff
PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Drive
Brisbane, CA 94005

or E-mail: gvederman@pcgamer.com

The Game Machine

The Game Machine represents what we consider a solid, affordable gaming PC that will handle every game currently on the shelves. The Game Machine has a maximum theoretical price of $2,500 — but shop around, and you'll find it for much less. In the span of only a very few months, we've taken the processor up from 200MHz to 233 — and now to a Pentium II 233 — to keep ahead of recent increases in games' minimum requirements. We've also replaced the Rendition card with a Riva 128. But we're sticking with a good, old 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics-based 3D accelerator; the newer Voodoo II is a very hot chipset, but the Voodoo Graphics is still plenty powerful for most games.

- **Intel Pentium II 233 MMX**
- **32MB SDRAM RAM**
- **NVIDIA RIVA 128 card OR 128-bit 2D card**
- **3Dfx Voodoo Graphics-based 3D accelerator**
- **4GB IDE hard drive**
- **16x CD-ROM drive**
- **Sound Blaster AWE32 AND/ OR positional sound card**
- **17" SVGA monitor, .25 dot pitch**
- **Multi-player gamepad (Gravis Gamepad Pro OR Microsoft SideWinder)**
- **56K modem**

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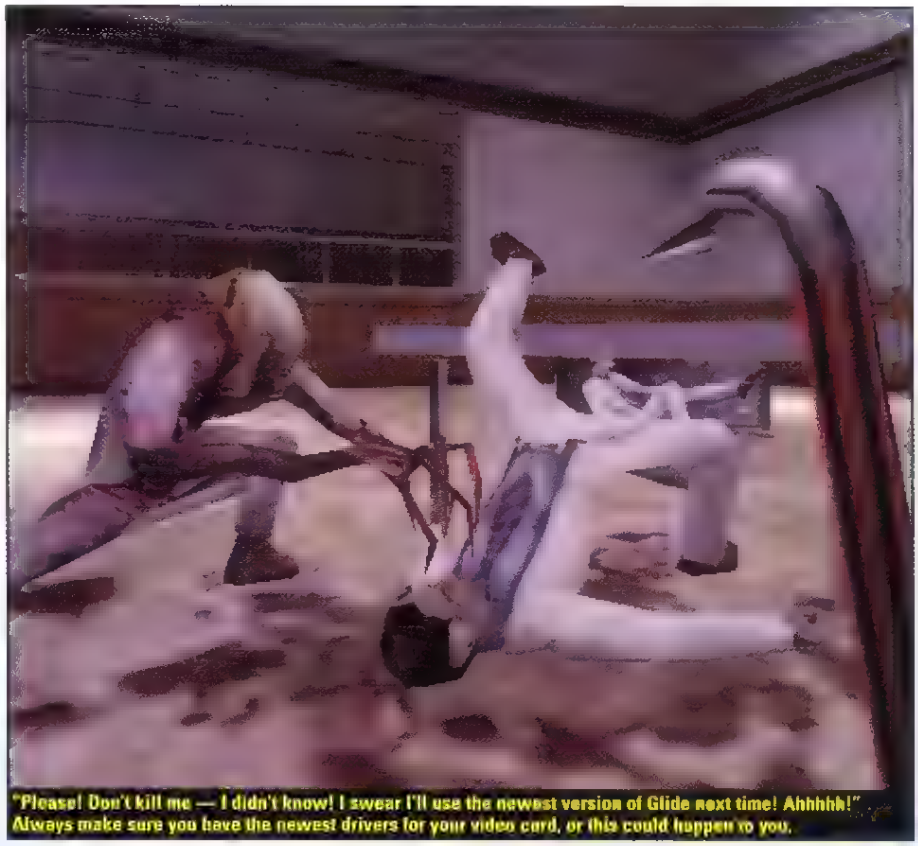
2 No, Xeon processors are intended for the server market and offer no appreciable performance gains over standard Pentium II 450MHz CPUs when it comes to playing games. And, as we've said in the past, there are very few games that take advantage of multiple processors — and they'll only do it if you're running Windows NT so there's very little reason for most gamers to concern themselves with dual-processor systems, Xeon or Pentium II-based. It's okay to be jealous of your friend's computer (heck, we are), but unless you intend to run something like a commercial web site or a big office network, having a single Pentium II 450MHz will yield the same performance in just about every application you'd use.

The Xeon may look huge and impressive, but when it comes to playing games, size doesn't matter.



"Please! Don't kill me — I didn't know! I swear I'll use the newest version of Glide next time! Ahhhhh!" Always make sure you have the newest drivers for your video card, or this could happen to you.

Q My system indicates that my USB ports are functioning properly, but Windows 95 doesn't recognize any driver for the Thrustmaster Fusion Digital Game Pad (USB) I just purchased. I've tried everything I can think of, but I still can't find a driver or configuration that works under Windows 95. Do I need an updated driver or something? I sent an E-mail to Thrustmaster requesting a solution to my problem, but they have yet to respond. Could please help me get to the bottom of this?

—Bill Anderson, via the Internet

A Unfortunately, most USB products hitting the shelves these days only function under Windows 98. The reason is that Microsoft no longer allows developers to support USB functionality under Windows 95 — not because such devices wouldn't otherwise function, but because Microsoft wants everyone to upgrade to its newest OS. We haven't seen the box that the Fusion gamepad comes in, but if we had to guess, we'd bet that it mentions somewhere that it requires Win 98 to function — it's certainly mentioned on Thrustmaster's web site. We called Thrustmaster to see if there was any way around the problem, and we were informed there wasn't. We'd suggest that you return to the store you purchased the pad from and try exchanging your USB version for the standard gameport version Thrustmaster says should also be available — that, or, go ahead and make the upgrade to Win98. We wish there were another way, Bill, but unfortunately there isn't.

Oh, the colors, the colors! Make sure you have Win98 if you want to use the USB Fusion.

Q I have a Creative Labs Voodoo2 board. I recently purchased *Half-Life*, and in the readme file it says that I need Glide version 2.54 or higher — which I don't gol-dern have! I've been roaming the Internet in search of this elusive driver so that I might play my new game, but so far I've had no luck. Could you please tell me where I might find this newer version of Glide?

Also, when I ran the DirectX system check on my PC recently, it said my Voodoo2 driver was DirectX 5.0 compliant. I have DirectX 6.0 installed on my computer, so what gives? Why isn't my Voodoo2 DirectX 6.0 compliant?

—Di Yan, via the Internet

A Di, this is your lucky day. We can solve both of your problems in one fell swoop. Simply go to *www.3dfx.com/docs/v2_sli_drivers/v2_sli_drivers.html*, and download the Voodoo2 Software Kit v3.01. As we go to press, this is 3Dfx's latest and greatest version of its Voodoo2 drivers. Once installed, it will give you support for Glide 2.5x *and* Glide 3.x. In addition, it adds support for DirectX 6.0. Even though these aren't Creative's drivers, in the case of Voodoo2 boards based on 3Dfx's reference design (like yours), we recommend using 3Dfx's reference drivers, because they're always first to arrive with the newest enhancements for the Voodoo2 chipset.

Glossary

Every month, the Glossary will define terms that appear in The Hard Stuff and may be new or confusing to some readers.

Bump-Mapping
A rendering technique whereby flat polygons are made to look as though they have texture by creating slight "bumps." Bump-maps are usually created by lighting one side of a small portion of a texture map while leaving the other side dark, thus simulating the shadow cast by a nonexistent "bump."

Intel Pentium II Xeon
Intended for the server and workstation market, Xeons share the same core as standard Pentium IIs with one slight difference: while the built-in Level 2 cache of a Pentium II runs only at half speed of the chip's speed, a Xeon's Level 2 cache runs at the same speed as the processor itself. Even so, there's virtually no difference in performance levels between the Pentium II and Xeon when playing games.

True Color
Any software or graphics accelerator that uses at least 24 data bits to define the color of each pixel on the screen is running in true-color mode, which allows for 16 million different colors.

The Kingdoms

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- Traverse 3D environments filled with forests, marshes, rolling hills and mystical keeps.
- A streamlined and intuitive interface lets you concentrate on the combat.
- Challenge friends over LAN, modem and on Cavedog Entertainment's own **Boneyards™**.
- Features hardware support for stunning graphics and special effects.

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Charge with hundreds of unique units, including monsters, dragons, catapults and skeleton archers.

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–Computer Gaming World: Cover story

"... the ... look of Kingdoms is completely unbelievable."
-Imagine Gaming Network

"...some of the most amazing character design we have ever seen..."
—GameFan

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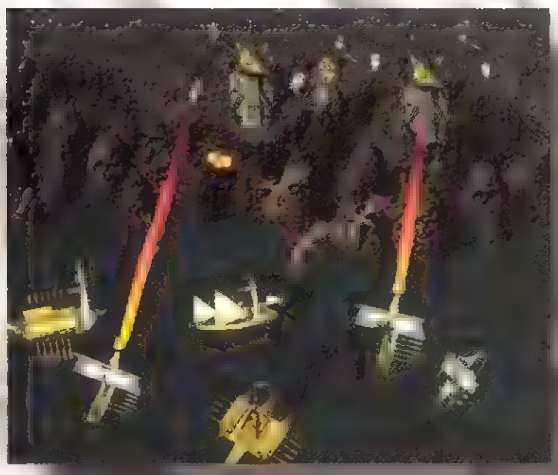
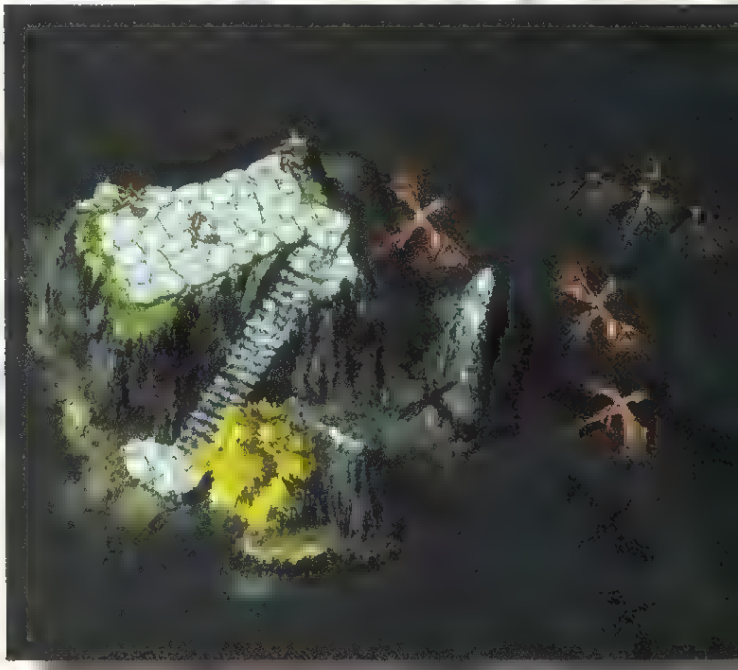
are in chaos...



Attack the skull-adyliffs of Taros with mighty naval vessels.



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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

This game is for mature audiences.

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1-8 Players Internet/LAN

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Second Helpings

T. Liam McDonald

There's something inherently wrong about rewarding incompetence, especially when you know it's insidious and ongoing. But it's equally wrong to ignore when someone finally makes right, no matter how long it takes Sierra is the case in point: Last year, they opted for a quick buck over customer satisfaction by publishing a whole series of unfinished or defective products This decision obviously came from the highest levels of management, and not only did it show a distasteful contempt for Sierra's customers, but also for the developers, who saw their hard work ritually slaughtered by gamers and reviewers because it was sent out to the marketplace prematurely

Some companies would've abandoned the product or slowly fixed it, then made the people who had already bought the game buy it again. We see this over and over in computer gaming; Sierra hardly has a corner on the "publish now, patch later" mentality. But Sierra saw the public relations nightmare it caused by publishing half-assed, incomplete games like *Red Baron II* and *Pro Pilot* and decided not to abandon these product lines. Considering the reverence with which many people regard *Red Baron*, *Aces of the Pacific*, and *Aces Over Europe*, cutting these best selling franchises loose to flounder and sink would also have been a pretty crappy business decision. *Red Baron* is a legend in flight sims that continues to carry weight, and many flight sims are still measured against it and the *Aces* games

That *Red Baron II* was an monumental mess goes without saying; it crashed repeatedly, featured blocky, inferior graphics, completely ignored essential 3D accelerator support, suffered from flaky flight models, and was capped off with unstable multi-player support. This wasn't a game: it was a train wreck. I was such a *Red Baron* fan that I refused to even load it at first. Our Fearless Editor, Dan Bennett, had already described the experience to me as something like "Load game, look at crappy graphics, crash to desktop, repeat." When I finally looked at it for myself, it was like watching a car crash in slow motion

But over the past year, the Dynamix wing of Sierra has diligently patched and tweaked *Red Baron II*. They fixed what was wrong, added 3D hardware support, and made these upgrades available to users of the original. In a move that should be an example to other publishers, Sierra has made the results, known as *Red Baron 3D*, available as a download, or as a 100 percent free upgrade to people who purchased the original. Just send Sierra your original disc, and they will send you *Red Baron 3D*, no charge. If you bought *Red Baron 3D*, send the receipt and the *Red Baron II* disc, and they'll refund your money. If that's not quite snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, it's an admirable attempt

Red Baron 3D has everything we had a right to expect from the original. In hours of play, I experienced no crashes whatsoever The graphics, choppy and pixelated in the original, are now smooth and fluid thanks to support for 3Dfx-based graphics cards (there's still no Direct3D support, however, so non-3Dfx gamers are out of luck). Resolutions as high as 1024x768 are supported, and the results are sharp terrain and object modeling. The cockpits are more finely detailed, to the point where instruments are even readable in virtual cockpit mode. An especially interesting new feature is a

The horribly crippled multi-play of *Red Baron II* has been completely replaced with massively multi-player dogfighting on the Internet via WON.net.

Everything about *Red Baron 3D* looks better: smoothed textures, readable cockpits, detailed objects, colorful explosions, and fluffy clouds. It stands up well next to the current crop of historical sims.

Sometimes leftovers are the high point of the meal. Sierra gives us fought knight's of the ruff, and it's better the second time around.

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"transparent cockpit" mode, which fades the cockpit so you can see objects through it, but leaves the instruments readable and provides a reference point for the nose.

Though the stability issues and visual improvements are the most noticeable changes, every other aspect of *Red Baron 3D* has been tweaked as well. The dynamic campaign was pretty intriguing to begin with, but campaign and mission structure seems even tighter, with more realistic encounters and pathing. Even more obvious are the improvements made to flight models. In putting some of the 22 flyable planes through their paces, I not only noticed differences in handling characteristics, but also some very tight modeling of stress effects. Stress on the struts, a wide array of spins, and some wicked torque are all here on the highest realism settings. *Flying Corps* took the medal for flight modeling before this, but *Red Baron 3D* seems to have outdone it.

Though there is still no co-op multi-player mission support, everything else about *Red Baron 3D*'s multi-play is strong. Sierra's WON.net service allows as many as 100 players in deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture the flag games. I didn't get to test performance with that many players, but the one-on-one dogfights I did try were smooth and not too laggy. Considering how quickly and completely *Red Baron II* was written off, it's amazing to see such a massive and satisfying overhaul. *Red Baron 3D* is the game it should have been all along, and it now stands as one of the best historical sims on the market.

Sierra didn't achieve quite this level of success with the reissue of *Pro Pilot*, dubbed *Pro Pilot 99*, but the company has at least brought it a bit closer to the goal of being the *Microsoft Flight Simulator*-killer. Considering that Microsoft has had more than 10 years to prefect its version of the civilian flight simulator, it was pretty ballsy (or stupid, depending on your perspective) of Sierra to think it could hop right in and compete — and, in fact, it didn't. Like *Red Baron II*, released at about the same time, *Pro Pilot* suffered from mediocre flight models, instability, and poor, unaccelerated graphics.

Once again, the most readily apparent changes are bug-killing and graphics enhancements. With the addition of 3Dfx support, *Pro Pilot 99* now features smooth graphics, better fog and haze effects, and some truly dazzling clouds. The United States, Canada, and Western Europe are all mapped, with more than 3,500 airports accurately represented. Terrain modeling is very effective, with plenty of elevation changes, but terrain textures are nothing special. And if the textures used for Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator* are any hint of what the next-gen *MS Flight Sim* will be, then *Pro Pilot* will once again be left choking on Microsoft's exhaust.

Documentation has also been greatly expanded, and the addition of a Pop-Up Operator's Handbook puts important checklists and learning information within easy reach. The range of tutorials and video clips, coupled with the copious documentation, give *Pro Pilot 99* a bit of an edge in the learning department. The flight model improvements make the planes feel better than they did in the original, but they're still not up to the standards of *Flight Sim* or *Flight Unlimited II*, and they fail utterly in extreme vertical maneuvers like loops. *Pro Pilot 99* may be an improvement, but it's still a third choice among civilian sims. In a field that basically consists of three products, that's not too good — but it's getting closer.

PCG

BUG PATCHES*

***Caesar III* v.1.0.1.0** (Sierra): There is now a warning when the building sprite limit is reached. The governor's name will no longer be reset to "The New Governor" or take the name from a previous game when changing games or maps. There is no longer a charge for building plazas on top of plazas. Governor's palaces and oracles no longer state that they have poor access to labor (they need no workers). There is a warning when housing is built too far from a road (more than 2 squares). There is a warning when housing is cut off from the "Road to Rome." Prefects passing by a fire that they have not been assigned to will now stop and fight the fire. The possibility of fires in the desert has been reduced a little. The combat strength of prefects has been increased some. A trade city no longer wishes to buy zero fruit per year in the Caesarea scenario. Marble can now be imported in the Damascus scenario. Many other changes. *C3UP11.ZIP*

***Fallout 2* v.1.02D** (Interplay): This is the final patch for the US version *only*. Fixed T-Ray not taking money for getting car back. Fixed Stuart Little boxing so that he only gives you one chance to repeat. All boxing problems have been addressed. Critical failures count as a knockdown; this is not going to be changed. Many other changes. Be sure to read the README.TXT file included with the patch. Your saved games from version 1.0 will *not* be compatible, although Interplay is working on a utility to convert old saved games — check *www.interplay.com/fallout2* for more details. *F2PATCH.EXE*

FALLOUT 2

***Half-Life* v.1.0.0.6** (Sierra): Disabled the music-track check in CD Authentication since it was tripping up legitimate customers. Adjusted the default configuration for multi-player to be more appropriate for people with lower-speed modems or with high ping/bad packet loss. The default rate for LAN games is now set to 9999; originally, it was the same as the Internet rate. Removed the WON authentication attempts for LAN games. LAN games are limited to a single, Class B address range. Fixed an uninstall issue that may affect custom locations. Fixed an A3D underwater sound bug. *HL1006.ZIP*

***Heretic II* v.1.01** (Activision): The patch fixes some joystick and gamepad issues. If you do not have a problem with your joystick or gamepad, you do not need to install the patch. *H2_V1_01.EXE*

***Quake II* v.3.20** (Activision): - Fixed a network problem where an oversize packet could cause a client crash. Fixed the long-standing *Quake II* bug where you would occasionally spawn or teleport and find yourself either looking straight at the ceiling or down at the floor. Other changes. Also contains updated Capture the Flag. *Q2320CTF.ZIP*

***Rainbow Six* v.1.04** (Red Storm Entertainment): Gunfire combat model chart deleted by patch (fixes shotgun problems). Shooting through portals should be corrected. Players should no longer be able to warp through walls by artificially inducing lag. Using the arrow keys to manually join should now show proper graphics. Network version number raised to 1.04. Removed some bandwidth constants to eliminate possible cheat. If a multi-player game type is restricted to certain missions, only those missions will appear in the server's list. Timer bar now shows up properly on clients in multi-player when game time is changed. Biosuits appear properly in co-op and adversarial multi-player. Improved the server validation of gunshots. Clients should have fewer instances where they thought for sure they hit someone near an obstacle but the server rejected it as being blocked. Many other fixes. *R6104.ZIP*

***Return to Krondor* v.1.00.6** (Sierra): Fix for some intermittent crashes to Windows due to a bug in the mouth-movement code. Book options now will save to disk. Put in several workarounds to try and address DirectSound-related problems experienced on a few hardware/driver combinations. *RTK106.ZIP*

***Shogo* v.2.1** (Monolith Productions): This multi-player Point Release will update *Shogo* Version 1.0 (retail version) and *Shogo* 1.1 (alpha patch) to Version 2.0. The focus has been mainly on multi-player enhancements, but some single-player fixes and general game enhancements have been made as well. A detailed list of changes is in the READTHIS.TXT file. Warning: Previous saved games from version 1.0 or 1.1 are not compatible with this version. To counteract this, there is a levels cheat to get back to any level in the game. See the console section for details on how to use this option. There are two files on *The CD* to update *Shogo* — SMPR20.ZIP updates your version to 2.0, then use SHOGO21U.ZIP to update it to 2.1. *You must update* Shogo *to version 2.0 before updating to 2.1. SMPR20.ZIP* and *SHOGO21U.ZIP*

***WWII Fighters* v.1.05F** (Jane's Combat Simulations): Improved multi-player respawning. Switch for POV hat (Panning or Snap view). New option for mid-air collisions. New joystick sensitivity setting. New dead zone setting for joysticks added. Fix for double call signs in multi-player, campaign creator support. Much more. *WW2_105.ZIP*

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A dark tide of death and destruction is now raging over
your once peaceful realm, turning brother against brother,
clan against clan. Summon your courage and take your sword
and shield to the death against a demonic vampire who feeds on
human souls.

Battle as one of [illegible] characters,
each possessing [illegible] strengths and abilities.

Conquer malicious [illegible] and mythical beasts in
thousands of chambers [illegible] hundreds of miles of
dangerous lands.

Cast spells and wield [illegible]
[illegible]

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Ever Questing

I have walked the plains of Karana, sailed the Ocean of Tears. I've begged for bread in the marble-tiled halls of Erudin and crossed steel with hissing goblins in the glaciers of Everfrost, watched their black blood sizzle in the cold snow.

I am hooked on *EverQuest*.

Ever since hitting Tolkien at age ten, I've been one of those people who needs a regular fantasy fix. But since I can't read swords-and-sorcery novels anymore—same old plots—and have no time to paper game, this craving has been long unfulfilled. The recent single-player computer RPGs are getting too linear and story driven for my tastes, but online RPGs give me sociability and open-ended freedom, and they also let me pick up and play whenever I want, fulfilling my fantasy fix.

So why *EverQuest* and not one of half a dozen other nascent online worlds? In a word: immersion. I know game writers constantly harp on immersion and gameplay, but what exactly do we mean?

To me, it's when the separation between the player in the chair and the character on the screen vanishes, and it is you who are in the game, thinking and dodging, chatting and twitching. We've all seen people caught up in a video-game trance, glassy-eyed and slow to answer questions, and hopefully we all know what such a trance feels like, whether it's manhandling troops in *Red Alert* or perfecting another turn in *Civilization*. In *EverQuest*, you are Strider the Ranger, roaming across the carrion-strewn hills of Qeynos, torch in hand. It's a magical quality, hard to capture and harder to keep.

But games, whatever the genre, must live or die in how well they suspend disbelief, by how often and how consistently they deliver this altered state of reality. Not every gamer will fall under the same spell—that's why we have genres—but the best games all have that rare magic that keeps us up until 4 a.m. Now, many things can wreck the mood: bugs, crashes, or a hackneyed story line, and the makers of Internet games have the added burdens of latency, cheating, and player-killing.

EverQuest tackles these hurdles magnificently. Its milieu and design is never unique, but it is cut of the tried-and-true Tolkien-Advanced Dungeons & Dragons cloth. But where it excels is in environment. This is a vast world, with the most spectacular virtual vistas ever seen in an online game. No other game feels so much like a fantasy novel. You can be footing it through barren

Everfrost with a couple of other adventurers, and suddenly you'll cross an ice floe and see the moonlight flowing across some aeon-old ruin; to be able to ooh! and ah! along with other characters in real time—nothing else compares. 3D acceleration has earned its rightful place in online RPGs as a storytelling aid.

But more important than the sheer size of the world and the many-colored splendor of its visuals is the care that was put into making what you explore varied and fresh—it will take you many months to see everything *EverQuest* has to offer. No identically textured and populated towns here—the designers went to great lengths to make, say, the city of the Dwarves distinctly different from that of the hamlet of the Barbarians or the tree town of the Wood Elves. Certainly the well-traveled crossroads are thickly peopled, but there's always a section of the city, a bit of wilderness, a mysterious tunnel opening at the bottom of a pool that leads off to somewhere dark and dangerous, keeping your sense of wonder fresh and making you hope the story never ends.

Those are just some of the big things that work—but there are little touches, too. Take the game's name-censor. I know there are people out there who like to run around MUDs under the name Sir Butthead or whatnot, but that kind of incongruity disrupts roleplaying, and the designers made the right choice in banning silliness. (For those unable to coin an appropriate name, a random generator is available.) Another technique is with the language skill—if someone says to you in Auld Dwarven "Where's the bank?" the program garbles their messages, returning "Whozis mic moak?" if you can't speak any Dwarven. It's an old MUD trick, but an effective one.

EverQuest is by no means perfect—toward the end of the beta test, players began to outnumber the monsters in many areas. Much of the game is rote hack and slash, and there's little real need to interact with other players. And even the language scrambler is a bit superfluous, because everyone can speak Common.

And what about player-killing? This is the blood test for today's online RPGs. In *EverQuest*, the only players who can attack each other are those who've set their P-Kill flag to "On." In the beta test, this meant 95% of the people had it off, and player-killing was never an issue, because it simply never happened.

Now this is a heavy-handed design decision, one completely at odds with the argument that a successful game must provide a believable experience in order to create an immersive world. After all, we are sentient creatures with free will in this imaginary world of Norrath, correct? So if yon Monk Osiris offends me, why can't I smite his pate with me broadsword?

But in this one case, the heavy-handed decision works. We all remember *Ultima Online*—how dangerous were the woods, thick with thieves and murderers. No one at Sony wanted *EverQuest* to turn into another Virtual Bandit Simulator, I guess, and until someone actually sits down and thinks about the consequences and implications of player-killing and how to protect newbies and discourage sociopaths, *Everquest*'s method will do. It may be inelegant, but it is better than the alternative: sheer anarchy.

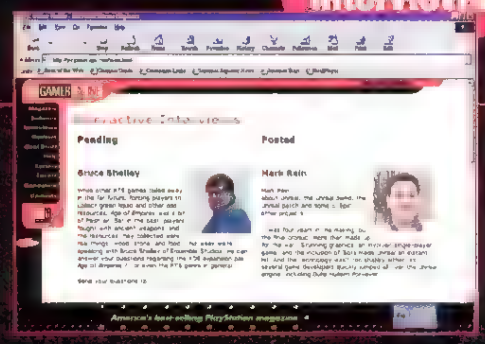
That aside, *EverQuest* has taken one huge step forward in creating and maintaining a compelling and rewarding alternate reality. And that's what it's all about.

PCG

Jason's been hanging out with the elves and dwarves in Sony's ambitious new online roleplaying game—and having a whale of a time in the process.

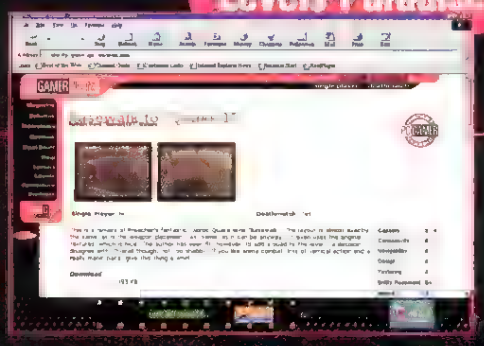
Why do what everyone else is doing?

Interviews



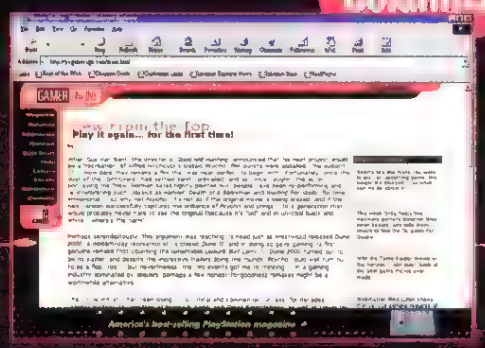
Want to know how today's top games are made? Stop by our Interactive Interviews area and ask the pros yourself.

Levels Paradise



Yearning for some *Quake II*, *Unreal*, or *StarCraft* levels? Then stop by our Levels Paradise, your only source for the best new levels out there.

Columns



The columnists in the magazine aren't the only folks with opinions. We have new columns every day from the likes of EIC Gary Whitta, the irreverent Colin Williamson, and others.

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Beauty and Brains

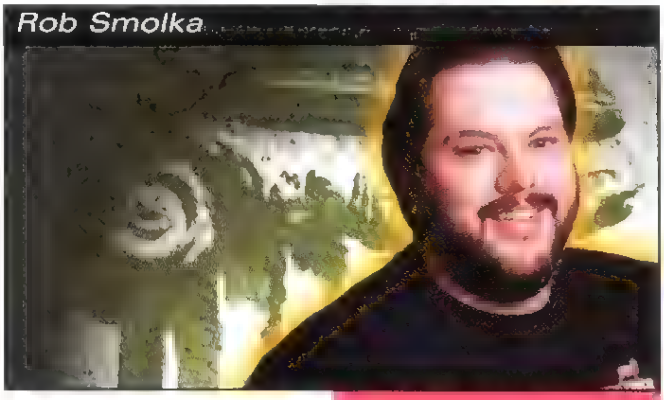
The one bright spot in an otherwise mediocre year for PC baseball games was *High Heat Baseball 1999*. I didn't feel the game deserved an Editors' Choice rating in my review (due mainly to its gameplay flaws and lack of features), but it turned out to be the game that devoured most of my free time during the baseball season; two full, 162-game seasons will attest to this. The good obviously outweighed the bad, and I'd have to say that the follow up, *High Heat 2000*, is right at the top of my most-anticipated-games list for 1999.

I visited Team .366 to get an early look at the new game and to find out why certain unfortunate design decisions were made in the inaugural title. As is so often the case in this industry, most of *High Heat*'s problems stemmed from the age-old battle with time; the team was fully aware of the deficiencies in certain areas of the game, but just didn't have the time to fix them. This all too-common rush to market didn't help the sales figures, at last count, the game has sold somewhere in the area of 4,800 copies — disappointing by any standard.

Mark Dickenson, the creative director on the project and a guy who has played nearly as many games of *High Heat* as myself, felt the same frustrations.

"The thing I hated most was when you had a runner on second and the ball was hit to the shortstop, and the runner just ran right into the shortstop," Dickenson says. "I was at the point where we were just going to have the runner stay on the bag unless you told him to run. We tried a lot of ways to fix the baserunning shortcomings in the patches we issued, but it was just too complicated for a quick fix. It involved a total reworking of the code. We're working very hard to get all of this right this time. A lot of the problems, like the base running, lack of throwing errors, wild pitches, and passed balls just came down to a matter of time. With the established base we have, it gives us more time to devote to issues like this."

One area in which *High Heat* excelled was the artificial intelligence of the managers and computer-controlled players. Mike Roca was responsible for the majority of the AI work, and he's back to add his expertise to the next version. I asked him what he feels is the biggest challenge in coding the AI in a game.



A visit with Team .366 has given our resident sports guru high hopes for *High Heat Baseball 2000*.

"The hardest part is coming up with a middle ground," Roca says. "Every human has his own idiosyncrasies when it comes to decision making that may not agree with the way the game was coded. This really comes into play in an area like sacrifices: there's a real discrepancy between how real managers approach this. A guy like Earl Weaver considered 10 sacrifices a year an ungodly number, while a manager like Gene Mauch had everybody on the team sacrificing. You have to decide where to draw the line."

The statistical model behind the game was also very strong when it came to games simulated entirely by the computer. As you can guess, though, adding a human player to the mix can wreak havoc with statistical accuracy. A human-controlled team in the hands of an experienced player tends to cause offensive numbers to skyrocket, but Roca says he hopes to tune this a little better with *High Heat 2000*. He wants the statistics to play more of a role in the outcomes: human-controlled batting, for instance.

"The particular player's stats tend to have the most effect when the timing of hitting the button is borderline," Roca says. "If Tony Gwynn is up, it'll probably be a single; if it's Rafael Belliard at bat, it'll probably be a swing and a miss. I think we need to widen the zone where this comes into play in the next version. Right now, it's too easy for a good arcade player to take a team of Rafael Belliard's and hit .280 with them."

There are plenty of other hurdles that an AI coder has to deal with, but chief among them is the battle between what the computer thinks is the best strategy — basing its decision making on pure numbers — and what goes on in the real world.

"I have to skew things based on what a real manager would do, not necessarily what the math says is best," Roca says. "A good example is for stealing home with two outs. Unless there's a really good hitter at the plate, and especially when a pitcher is up, this may turn out to be the best-percentage play. But, of course, stealing home is very rare, and this isn't how it works in real life — so I find that I have to put a lot of biases into the code to make it appear realistic."

These are just some of the balancing acts that have to be faced when designing a game that appears to be intelligent, but also has that "human" feel. Biases and random factors have to be built into every area of the game on a time-consuming case-by-case basis.

I hope to have further details on *High Heat 2000* as the game shapes up for its release at the beginning of the baseball season. For now, know that the new polygon players are looking very nice, the already gorgeous stadiums look even better, with more detail; and the coaching and general manager features that were missing from the first game should please any Front Page Sports fan lamenting the demise of that series. In fact, the career mode will include three levels of minor leagues that will play simulated games to clue you in to a player's expcted performance! Top that off with improvements to areas that were already excellent, and you can see why I'm so excited. Batter up!

PCG

Crafting Your Own Worlds

The other day, I noticed a little folder named "worldcraft" on my *Half-Life* CD-ROM. This folder, of course, contains Worldcraft 2.0 the level editor used by the designers at Valve to build all of the levels in *Half-Life*. I was curious about Worldcraft 2.0, since I had dabbled with level design a couple of years ago and wanted to find out if I could build something worthwhile today. So I installed it and spent the next two days building a simple death match level I like to call Bazooka Arena.

My first task was to create a profile for *Half-Life* Worldcraft supports several different *Quake*-engine games, and each requires its own settings for game-specific options like textures, entities, utilities, and so on Once I had everything properly configured, it was time to start laying down the building blocks for my level. Worldcraft comes with a set of well written tutorials (or "tuts" as those of us in the know like to call them) that teach you all the basics of level editing, from creating convex blocks (called "brushes") to tweaking enemy AI.

After familiarizing myself with the tutorials, I created and positioned the brushes that would form the basic architecture of my level The layout is basically a round room with opposing semi-circle platforms attached to the walls. Once all of the building blocks were in place, I chose the final textures for each object Textures for light fixtures automatically emit light in the final playable level, so I made sure there were enough light textures to adequately illuminate everything. Then came the task of placing weapons, ammunition, and health After everything was in place, I compiled the level and fired it up in *Half-Life*

If you want to try out it out for yourself, you can find it on *The CD* or on our FTP server at *ftp.pcgamer.com/levels/halflife/bazooka3.zip*. We're also running it on our *Half-Life* deathmatch server at *half-life.pcgamer.com*

I realize Bazooka Arena isn't exactly the pinnacle of great level design, but it's a fun ride and gives players a chance to put those laser-guided rockets to good use. I had fun making it and look forward to possibly doing some more levels in the future with a more "serious" tone.

Now that I have a little bit of experience with designing levels, I feel qualified to hand out a few tips like I actually know what I'm talking about. Ignore at your own peril!

Start Small Try to put aside those grand plans long enough to produce something small and simple Try a small one-room deathmatch level. If single player is more your cup of tea, then build a "boss level." The important thing is to finish it in a few days so you'll have experienced all of the steps in the development cycle. Then try something bigger for your next level

Get Feedback Accept all criticism with an open mind. Getting defensive when someone says "you should put more ammo in the rec room" defeats the purpose of getting feedback in the first place. On the other hand, advice like "cover the ceiling with tentacle monsters and only give the player a crowbar to whack 'em with!" should be taken with a grain of salt

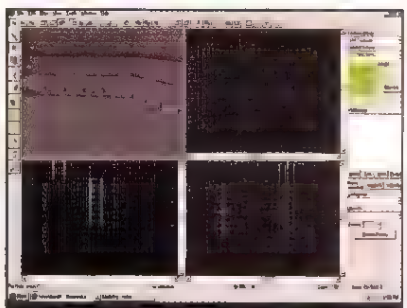
Repeat. Eddie Van Halen didn't get to be a great guitar player by sitting around the house mending his jeans and drinking all day. He practiced a ridiculous number of hours each day *before* drinking. So should good level designers — practice, I mean. Difficult tasks will become second nature, and your designs will get better

If designing levels is something you enjoy doing, make time for it every day — even if only for as little as 30 minutes a day. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to start work on a level inspired by Coconut Monkey's "Fish in a Barrel."

PCG

A bazooka is really easy to come by in this desperate part of the lab. Point the red dot where you want your rocket to go and guide it in for the kill.

Michael Luton, a.k.a. "Sandmoose"



A free beta version of Worldcraft comes with *Half-Life*, but Sierra will release Worldcraft Pro sometime this winter.

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Adventure Gaming Is Not Dead

Take a look at the text at the top of this page. See the first word under the "Alternate Lives" banner? Yep, that's right: *Adventure*. It struck me recently that I don't cover adventure games often enough in this little soapbox of mine.

Why is that? Well, it's essentially because very few companies have been making adventure games. Personally, I blame *Myst* and all of the imitators its success inspired. Those games wear the name "adventure," but they prove that pretty graphics and entertaining gameplay aren't one and the same.

And yet it doesn't seem to bother many gamers. When only a few roleplaying games come out in a given year, we get letters and E-mails from droves of hungry gamers shouting their indignity from rooftops. But adventure games? As long as there's a decent action game with a coherent story line (*Half-Life*) or mind bending puzzles (*Tomb Raider*), or even the latest version of *Riven* (is the slide-show any better on DVD?), the lack of a decent, old-fashioned adventure game goes unnoticed.

Fortunately, this drought that no one seems to have noticed has already ended. Adventures have changed shape, style and, as with the vast majority of computer games coming on the market today, they bear the holy icon of 3D acceleration. So, without further ado, here are some of the adventure titles that are sure to whet your appetite as you scour the post holiday software sales:

Grim Fandango

Who doesn't want to play a travel agent for the dead? Borrowing heavily from sources as diverse as the Mexican Day of the Dead and 1940s film noir, *Grim Fandango* casts you in the role of Manuel Calavera as he searches to unravel a mystery in the afterlife. Sound ambitious? Well, it's from LucasArts, isn't it? Manny and his cohorts are 3D creatures in a 2D world, with shifting camera angles and lots of pretty, pre-rendered backgrounds. True to the LucasArts standard, you can expect some quality voice acting and puzzles that provide a nice return on your mental investment. And unlike most of the other adventure games on this list, you don't have to be a speed demon with the gamepad to get through most of the puzzles.

Michael Wolf

TES Adventures: Redguard

Breaking away from the in depth, non-linear, stat-heavy format of the Elder Scrolls roleplaying games, Bethesda's *Redguard* is an out-and-out adventure that pits you, the player, against the hordes of the Evil Empire as you search for your missing sister. Complete with a twisty turny plot, block moving puzzles, and lots of interaction with a host of non-player characters, the game is sure to satisfy the adventure bug in most players. Those who aren't fans of fast finger-twitchin' excitement, however, might want to keep in mind that the character you play is a swashbuckling pirate-type. That means lots of real-time sword battles and enough arcade-style jumping to make anyone feel like Errol Flynn.

Quest for Glory V: Dragonfire

The Quest for Glory series has a hardcore following of devoted adventure fans. The combination of roleplaying elements with a Sierra-style graphic adventure has always been a winning mix, and the latest chapter capitalizes on what the series does best. The real-time combat adds a nice flavor of excitement, but you can count on the usual brain busting puzzles that involve some truly bizarre fauna among the flora.

After a decline that no one noticed, adventure gaming is on the rise — and it's time to take a look at what's on the table.

King's Quest: Mask of Eternity

Next on the rather huge Sierra adventure release list is the latest King's Quest adventure. The game marks a true departure from its 2D roots, for the first time turning Daventry into a 3D world. The *Tomb Raider*-style controls foretell the kinds of puzzles Lara Croft would be at home with, and the real-time combat makes it a twitch-fest. It will remind many of *Redguard*, albeit with more options — but not necessarily better gameplay.

Gabriel Knight III: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

Aside from a hugely long title, the latest Gabriel Knight adventure (the series I personally think is the best of the Sierra bunch) promises yet another departure from familiar adventure territory. It's another 3D game, and you get to see ol' Gabriel in all his polygon glory as he works through the latest supernatural issues complicating his life. Jane Jensen's talent as a storyteller should make this one of the most involving and entertaining adventure games yet; it's well worth a look for that reason alone.

But wait — there's more!

Those are just a handful of the games on the shelves or on the way for adventure fans. Expect more coming down the pike soon, including still more games from Sierra. (Although, sadly, the company's apparent return to its roots doesn't include plans for another Space Quest game. A mistake for them and a loss to the adventure community, if you ask me.) Also, LucasArts promises to wow us with *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* (check out our feature in the December '98 issue). At least the glut of bad *Myst* clones seems to have tapered off to a clueless few. .

PCG

http://pcgn.com

Bad Taste

Howard Stern's Private Parts

Something About Mary

Old David Letterman

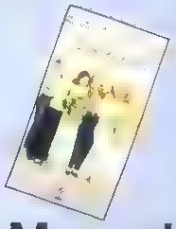
Carmaggeddon II

PC accelerator

PC Accelerator

Good Taste

Martha Stewart's Living

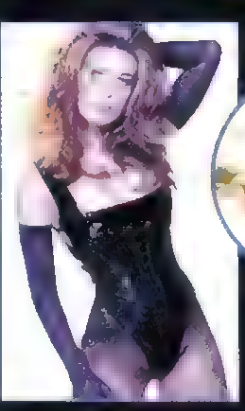


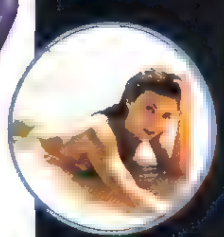
Steel Magnolias

New David Letterman

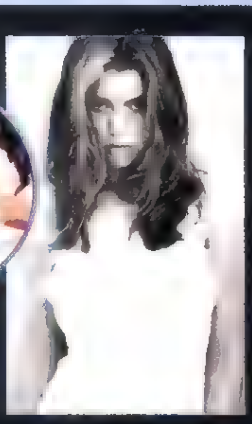
Driver's Education '99

Other Magazines





We'll NEVER cross that line



Steel Panthers II does WWII

William R. Trotter

Five fans of SSI's *Steel Panthers II* fans have created the ultimate add-on featuring World War Two — and it's available for free on the 'net!

My house was built in 1906, when there was a great rage for things *Chinoise*. The original builders planted some "decorative" bamboo in groves around the backyard. In the near-century since then, the damned stuff has taken over: it consumes fully half the backyard in the spring unless it's tended to. No weed killer (short of Agent Orange or napalm) fazes it. Its roots are so knotted, muscular, and tenacious that it takes two sweaty hours to dig up just one plant. Every spring, therefore, I wage war with a chainsaw for two or three days just to restore the balance of nature. The bamboo will never completely take over, but I'll never completely get rid of it, either.

There are times when wargamers and their passions remind me of the tenacity of those bamboo roots. How often, during the past decade, have I read lofty pronouncements that wargaming was dead as a mass-market product, consigned to the limbo of permanent niche market? And how many times has the genre — like my backyard bamboo — bounced back with surprising strength and tenacity? It's the genre that refuses to die!

Case in point: *Steel Panthers II — World War Two*. It's a mammoth project concocted by five people in four time zones, speaking three different languages and investing thousands of man hours — and completely unmotivated by any thought of profit.

One thing they all had in common: they were *Steel Panthers II* addicts, and they all wanted to see the *SP2* engine applied to WWII units and formations. Since SSI had made it known that it would not be publishing any more add-ons for the first three games in the series, the fans decided to create their own.

It was all made possible because a wargamer named Fred Chlanda created a scenario editor called SHPEdit. Although it was primarily designed to work with the *Panzer General* games, it turned out to work just as well on the *SP2* engine.

Canadian Don Goodbrand started the ball rolling by using Chlanda's program to open up the guts of *Steel Panthers II* and attempting to create some new WWII era icons. His first success was a horse-drawn supply wagon! Not as glamorous as a Panther tank, perhaps, but essential to many armies of the period.

"Our entire motivation was to bring WWII equipment into *SP2*," Goodbrand says. "I began by repainting some of the icons in the MOBs (Modern Orders of Battle) just so I could find out where everything was in the files."

But making the leap from modifying existing icons to creating totally new ones was not as simple as just mucking about with *Paint Shop Pro*.

"It took me a month of experimentation," he says, "to discover what colors worked best and how to manipulate them. *Steel Panthers II* uses its own proprietary palette of 256 colors. If you lighten a particular shade of green just a tiny bit too much, you get tan. And if you lighten the tan just a shade too much, you suddenly get bright yellow. It was a real pain until I got a handle on it."

Don contacted Nick Papp, a fellow fan, and E-mailed him the horse and wagon icon, asking if Papp would be interested in trying to modify the MOBs into WWII-era units. This was no small task; to give you an idea of what's involved, a typical MOB file for *SP2* contains separate databases for weapons, units, and formations. Altogether, we're talking 21,450 data entries to be checked for just *one* MOB, and the WWII modification contains 22 of them!

"A few months ago," Papp says, "we all realized that the MOBs were getting bogged down and we needed help. I contacted Andy Gailey in Scotland — Andy's the only person I know who has rewritten the orders of battle for all three of the SP games. I waved the magic horse-and-wagon specimen under his nose, and he was hooked, too."

At about this time, two more *SP2* fans got involved in the project. Piero Angeli of Italy did some of the graphics — more importantly, he organized all of the graphics so they would display properly in the game. He also supplied many photos and specs for rare Italian and Spanish units. In Germany, Maik Ehrhardt agreed to act as Quality Control monitor, combing through the data scrupulously to catch any inconsistencies, and supplying additional photos and specs for esoteric German units such as the gargantuan *Sturmmorser Tiger* and the Panther Mk II, which was designed but never produced.

By now, word of the project was spreading through the wargaming community. The original Five Horsemen had developed all the tools needed to create any WWII scenario imaginable. Enter veteran scenario programmer "Wild Bill" Wilder and his gang of colleagues (Wild Bill's Raiders). Wilder and friends had done the programming for many of the original SP games, and they got fired up about the WWII project. Some of the initial dozen scenarios represent variations on classic battles, but most of them deal with engagements that have never been wargamed before. Here's a partial list:

"The Pain of Peleliu"
(U.S. Marines vs. Japanese, Sept., 1944): The first-ever simulation of one of the bloodiest (and according to many historians, the most pointless) amphibious landings in the Pacific war.

"Flying Chindits"
(UK vs. Japanese, Burma,

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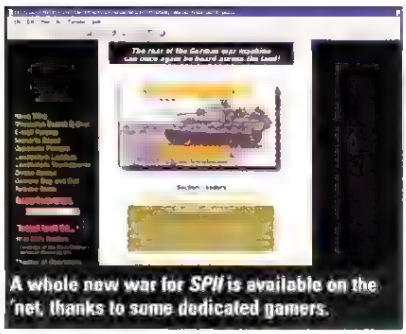

A whole new war for *SPII* is available on the 'net, thanks to some dedicated gamers.

March 1944): The largest g.ider/parachute operation in the Pacific Theater, a massive .anding in the Burmese jun g.e deep behind Japanese .ines A tribute to the mem- ory of the legendary Orde Wingate, one of the most brilliant, and definitely one of the most eccentric, comman ders of the era

"Renearsal for Crete (UK vs. Germans, Corinth Bridge, Greece, April, 1942) A gallant fighting withdrawal by the Br.tish, who had been thrown in at the last minute to bolster the disintegrating Greek army

"Crown of Thorns" (UK vs. Germans, July, 1944): Depicts the brutal, grinding battle of attr.t.on between Montgomery's huge, unwieldy force of British and Canadians against the vastly outnum bered but superbly .ed German defend ers of Caen

Bloody Tank Testing (Republicans vs. Fascists Guadalajara, March, 1937) Both H.tler and Stalin co.dly explo.ted Spain as a testing ground for their newest weapons. At Guadalajara, both sides fought their first large-scale armor battle

Treads and Hooves (U S. and Filipino forces vs Japanese, Luzon, January 1941). MacArthur bungled the defense of Luzon, but bet ter generalship on your part could alter history

Before you start drool ing, please note that in order to p.ay these new scenarios, you must own a copy of *Steel Panthers II* and do a full nstal. in a directory named SP2WW2. If you try to load the WWII mod onto an exist .ng install of the game, it won't work

How much will it cost you to download and play the new WWII games? Nothing Not a cent The designers are putting the who.e package up on The Gamer's Net and offering it as freeware. Pretty amazing, I think

"I want to thank David Heath, owner and sponsor of The Gamer's Net (*www.thegamers.net*), for having such faith in our work and for giving us a forum for displaying it," says Papp "David has good ties with some of the major players at SSI, and all along he's been keeping them informed as to what we were doing and mak.ng sure that it met w.th their approval."

And why shouldn't SSI approve? Peop.e have been customizing the Steel games for years. But it's heartening to know that SSI still tacitly acknowledges the excellence of the kind of work Good brand, Papp, Ange.i, Gailey and Ehrhardt have done Once a wargamer, always a wargamer, I say

The saga of *Steel Panthers II World War Two* is an inspiring one The add on package went online at The Gamer's Net site on December 7 (appropriately enough). In just 24 hours, the site reported a record 140,000 hits and 3 500 downloads of the add-on

Some "niche market"

Now, I'm going to E mail this column to my superior officer, *Ubersturm Editor* Bennett, as soon as I've finished doing that, I'm going to download the pack- age and re-fight the Battle of Guadala'ara

(By the way, in some of the scenarios involv.ng American forces, you may run .nto an officer named Colonel Trotter, please refrain from sending him on suicide m.ssions, and he'll do his best to help you achieve a victory.)

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Hell Freezes Over

By now, you've already read the review of MicroProse's *Falcon 4.0* so there's only one question left that matters Why did it take Spectrum Ho.o-Byte (now MicroProse) more than four years to finish it?

We've really been waiting that long; a story on Spectrum HoloByte in our December 1994 issue featured three early screen shots. Little did we know just how early those shots would turn out to be. Spectrum said we definitely wouldn't see the new game before mid-1995 — but that prediction turned out to be off by more than three years.

So as soon as I heard that *Falcon 4.0* had gone to duplication in early December, I placed a call to Gilman Louie, MicroProse's chairman of the board and co-producer of the game, to get the official word on why this long awaited sim was so very long awaited.

"I don't think *Falcon 4.0* will ever be ready." — MICROPROSE CHAIRMAN GILMAN LOUIE

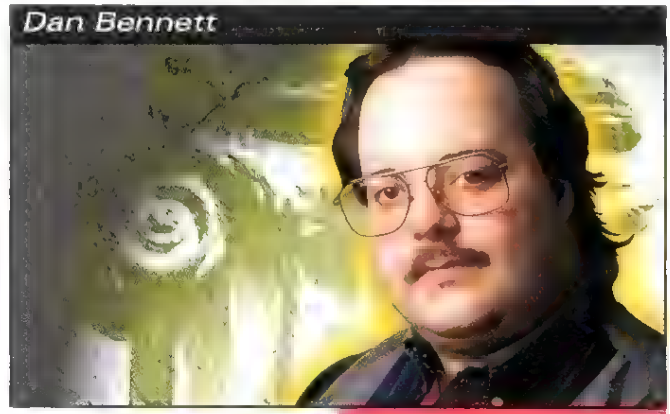
DB I'm sure a lot of factors went into the delays that plagued *Falcon 4.0*, but if you had to reduce them to a short answer, what would that be?

GL: I think the number one issue was the overly ambitious design. Number two was just the very talented — but very young — developer base. Usually a young team is given an easy product, and they kind of grow into it. With this particular team, they were given one of the most difficult products that you could possibly ever design

DB: You say the initial design was overly ambitious — was there ever a point where you had to throw everything away and start over?

GL. It wasn't so much of a restart — it was more thinking about where the compromises are going to be made in the game. And what they didn't have for a while was just somebody with the experience level to come in and help them make some of these key decisions. As with any big team without that kind of vision and leadership, projects tend to flounder

DB: Now that the game's finally out, it's hard to imagine many features that were left out of it Is the final version that different from the original concept?



GL: There were a couple of things they didn't do they wanted to do a virtual airbase, where you actually walked around in a *Quake* like world which is your airbase — that got scrapped in a hurry. They said, 'Well, gee, what are we going to put our energy behind?'

But just about every thing in the game is in the original design spec except some of the eye candy. In some weird way, the hardware finally caught up to the original vision of *Falcon 4.0*. If they were to attempt what they're doing today two years ago...they might've been able to finish the code, but the machine performance wouldn't be there to really execute the origina. design.

DB: Speaking of the eye candy — how much of the delay can be attributed to the need to keep pace with the bells and whistles of other sims released in the past few years?

GL: The fundamental issues that took a long time on *Falcon 4 0* were the [real-time] campaign that was part of the original design to start with — the avionics; the flight model; all of those are hard to do. Not the eye candy. Things like cockpit reflections that's three days of an artist's time. Better lens flares that's two days of an artist's and half a day of a programmer's time. Do the campaign right? That's about two years.

Believe it or not, *Falcon 4.0* is in stores — and Satan is shoveling snow. We asked MicroProse's main man what took so long.

So what's next? Louie says that for the first 90 days after the game's release, the *Falcon 4.0* team will turn its attention toward add-ons and enhancements that will be available for download at the game's official web site (*www.falcon4.com*).

"I think the web is changing how we deal with products," Louie says.

But gamers who've been paying attention know that's not necessarily a good thing. Last year, it became clearer than ever that the Internet makes it all too easy for once-reliable game companies to rationalize releasing products that aren't ready yet — since they can always release a patch via the web. I pointed that out to Louie, who has an interesting take on the issue.

"I don't think *Falcon 4.0* will ever be ready," he says "It's such a realistic product that there's so many different directions you can pull it. So the team basically said 'This is what we think is ready; this is what our beta testers think is ready.' And as soon as it gets in the hands of half a million users, they'll let us know what they think is ready."

If I were a cynical gamer (and I am), I'd point out that similar words were spoken about *Falcon 3.0*, which was one of the most bug-ridden games to date when it first released It took a whole slew of patches to fix a whole slew of problems, some of which should've been fixed before the game hit the shelves.

So far, though, *Falcon 4 0* seems much more stable and complete; it's a very complex sim, but I haven't run into any game killing bugs in a few weeks of play. So it's possible the team really will get to spend its time enhancing the game and responding to fans' suggestions rather than fixing glaring errors. Only time will tell, but it looks good so far. And it looks like it was worth the wait

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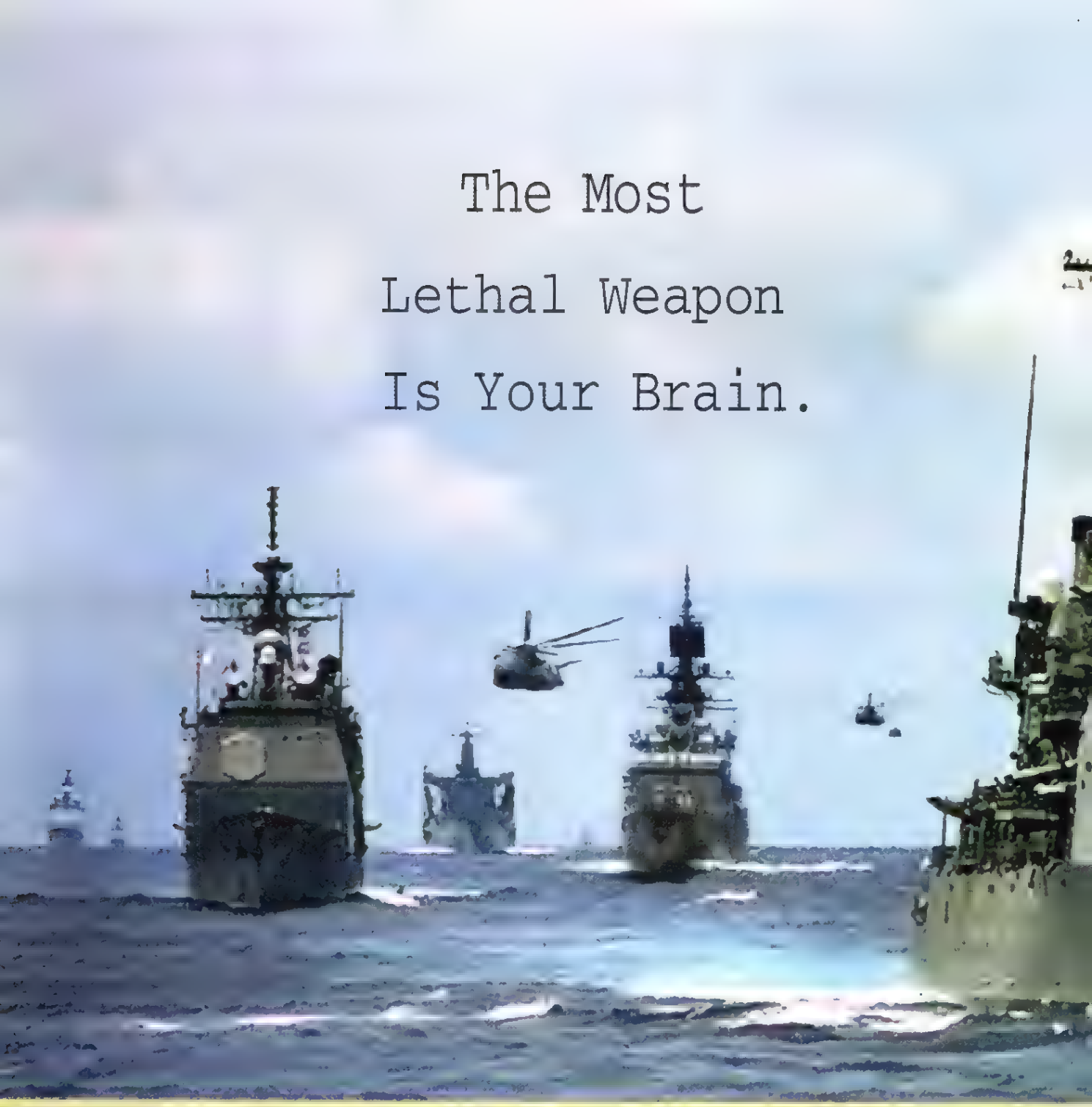

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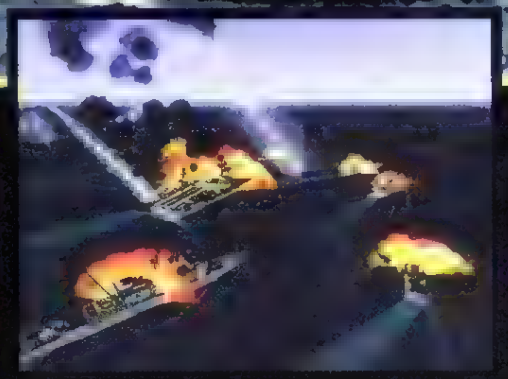

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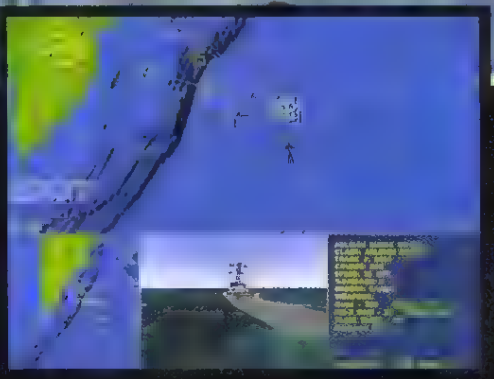

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STRATEGY CENTRAL

SOLUTIONS • TECHNIQUES • QUICK TIPS

So, you're still stuck somewhere in the middle of *Half-Life*, huh? Yeah, we know that it's a heck of game to get through. That's why Strategy Central is here with a step-by-step guide on the second half of the game. We've also got some great *Heretic II* tips straight from the developers, so get readin'!

Write to us at:

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peeceegee@aol.com
editor@pcgamer.com

Half-Life, Part 2

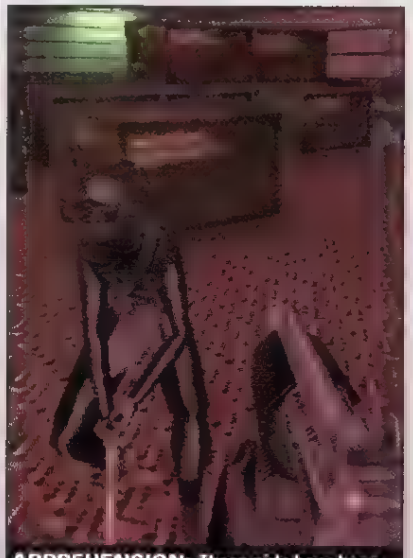
The conclusion of our step-by-step walkthrough...

Welcome back to the thrilling world of Anomalous Materials handling! Let's pick up where we left off last time — Gordon was hurtling through a dark tunnel on the back of a supply train, the entire U.S. military wanted him dead, and he just realized that he forgot to lock his car doors.

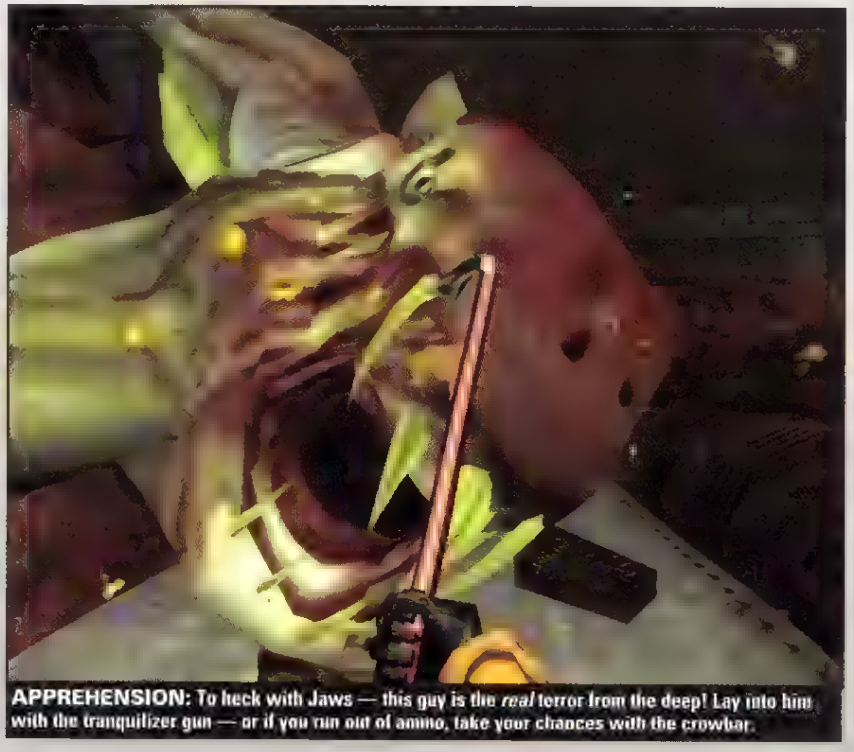
Apprehension

Hit the accelerator on the train, and you'll go hurtling through a wall and plunge into a watery warehouse. Dive down to the metal box containing the four barrels, and whack the lock to release them. Now use the barrels as stepping stones to get to the red-lit hallway. Head upstairs, giving the zombies some crowbar-lovin' on the way. Now drop down into the right side of the silo. Submerge, head through the underwater door, and follow the hallway until you reach a door. Head in and surface for some fresh air. Keep moving, and crouch past the rubble in the halls. You'll reach an intersection with a barred window. Use the crowbar on the grate to the right to stock up on the grenades inside, then knock over the computer and go through the door. Follow the hallway out until you see the giant piranha snacking on the scientist. Head around the pool, up the stairs, and into the shark cage. Wax the swimming beastie with the tranquilizer gun, then turn the red valve to get through the grate. Follow the stairs, destroy the barnacles and the alien slaves in the next room, and continue onward to the next

APPREHENSION: Whack the lock to send these canisters floating to the surface, then use 'em as stepping-stones.



APPREHENSION: These girls have been given orders to kill anything that moves — so show 'em who's boss with your trusty MP5.



APPREHENSION: To heck with Jaws — this guy is the *real* terror from the deep! Lay into him with the tranquilizer gun — or if you run out of ammo, take your chances with the crowbar.

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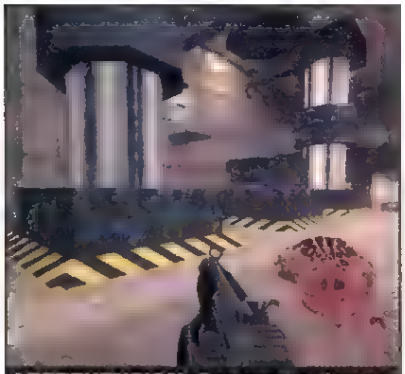

APPREHENSION: Once you start the generator on this level, you'll be able to hop across these presses to the next area.

pool. Do a running jump across the next section of bridge (one part will break away), then make a flying leap through the hole in the grate, right into the generator room. Now head up to the turbine room. Trigger the control panel to turn on the turbines, then hop across them to the next area. Nuke the beasties in the computer room, and your scientist buddy will help you out. Head through the refrigerated area, then down the ladder. Go through the next hallway, leaving a trail of dead alien slaves in your wake.

Ninja babe alert! The next area is home to three spandex-clad assassins, so show 'em who's boss. Be careful — they run faster and shoot more accurately than you do, so take 'em out with two headshots. Head up to the high platform and yank on the surface access lever.

Holy Star Wars! You're about to be crushed, so scramble up those boxes to the concrete ledge above. Walk across the tops of the compactors to grab the crowbar, then drop down to the grate and bust that sucker open

RESIDUE PROCESSING: Use the brown crushers directly in front of you as stepping stones in order to get across this vat of radioactive goo. One wrong move, and you're as good as dead.

Residue Processing

Follow the caves until you get to the processing plant. Turn the red valve, then quickly head up into the silo. Make your way through the tunnels, then follow the security guard and grab the gun that he drops. Climb up into the hazardous waste tub, then hop across the rocks. In the next room, use the brown crushers as stepping stones, and jump into the red pipe on the opposite side of the room. In the next room, the pipe on the right will break when you walk across it, so follow the one on the left, and hop back across. In the vat room, jump down to the left for a health recharge, then jump across the churners and through the pipe.

Get on the conveyor belt and fall into the pool. Surface, and climb up on the ledge before you get sucked into the churners. Walk around the machinery, then dive back in, and remember to crouch to avoid getting squooshed. In the next room, kill the critter, and throw the center switch in the conveyor control room. Head back to the room with the dead security guard and punch the button *exactly* when both crushers on the center conveyor belt are raised. Dive on to the conveyor belt and crouch past the crushers before they start again.

Dodge the crushers in the next area. Hop down onto the next conveyor (it runs through the glowing red oven), and keep jumping down belts until you see a wall on the left that has *two* belts running into it. There's a claymore mine set up in the left hole, so pick it off from

RESIDUE PROCESSING: The red hallway across this room is just a hop, skip, and a jump across these boiling vats of biohazard. Hope you've had your shots!

RESIDUE PROCESSING: Take a quick ride up this conveyor belt and drop a few stories into a pool of hazardous goo.

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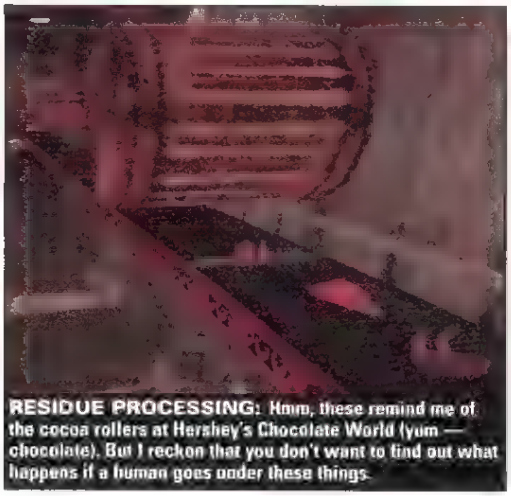


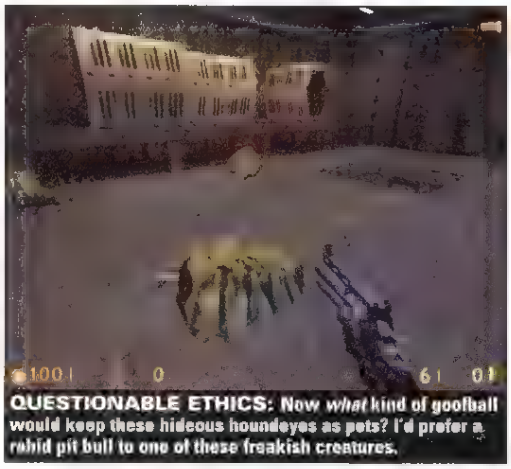
RESIDUE PROCESSING: Hmm, these remind me of the cocoa rollers at Hershey's Chocolate World (yum — chocolate). But I reckon that you don't want to find out what happens if a human goes under these things.

long range, or use the plastic explosives. Head through, and pick off the second claymore. To avoid the rollers in the next area, hop to the left belt, then back to the right belt. In the next room, do your best to avoid getting gibbed by the giant metal teeth. Jump across to the green ladder, then move through the red hallway.

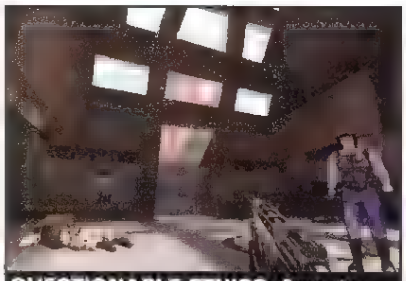
Questionable Ethics

If you've got any explosive charges left, now would be a *really* good time to use them. Break through the grate, toss a satchel into the room full of houndeyes, then drop back down and mash the detonator. Jump across the electric fence, grab some health, and move to the next room. Break the glass covering the button, and kill the creature. In the next room with the headcrabs, head into the control room and push the button for some sadistic fun. Head through the next door and kill the grunt, remembering to snatch his MP5. Keep heading across the lobby, up the stairs, and into the next lab. Push the button to open the cages, then grab the trank in the left cage and the package of tiny aliens in the right cage. Press onward, and at the intersection, take a right down the ramp. Walk across the room to the fallen guard with the claymores, then head up the ramp to the red control room. Pick off one of the claymores, then watch in amusement as raw chaos ensues. Head back down and kill any survivors, then go through the door that was blown open. Follow the hallway until you get to a room with headcrabs behind glass — smash the glass and kill them all, as it'll help you out down the road. Head up the stairs to the left.

In this hallway, you'll have to activate four lasers and pick up a new prototype weapon. Once you trigger all four, head into the main laser room, push the metal crate under the laser shield, and push the button. Go through the hole you just blew open. Say hello to your geeky buddies, then dodge the blades in the next room and shut off the power. Grab a scientist and retrace your steps to the pulsing red hallway where you dispatched all the headcrabs. Go up the stairs to the main lobby. Let Mr. Wizard unlock the door and head out. Be sure to watch out for the rooftop sentry guns, and take out the explosive crates.



QUESTIONABLE ETHICS: Now *what* kind of goofball would keep these hideous houndeyes as pets? I'd prefer a rabid pit bull to one of these freakish creatures.



QUESTIONABLE ETHICS: Congratulations, you've finally reached the lobby. Too bad the exit doesn't lead to the highway and a road stop with a bunch of browskies.

Surface Tension

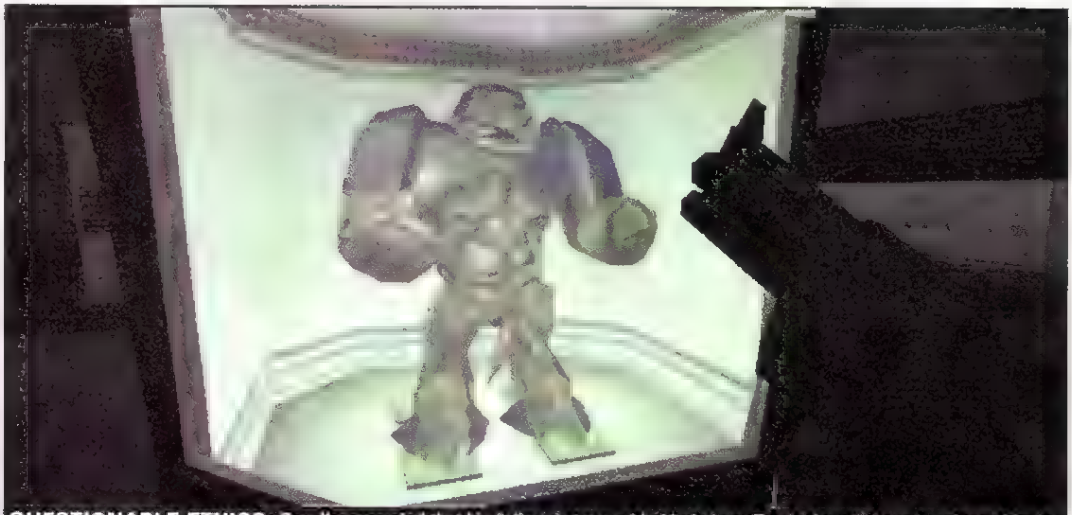
Surprise the friendly military personnel waiting for you by strategically blowing up the gas canisters. Once you get to the dam, stay the hell away from the helicopter, and jump down into the murky depths on the right. Climb the ladder into the control tower, hit the turbine control switch, then jump back in. Turn the red valve for approximately six seconds, then slip through the grate and under the dam. Follow the river, and head into the red pipes.

Go forward and up the ladder, then jump across the gap to the fallen trooper — you can grab some health and batteries. Jump back across and follow the concrete path. When you see the two wooden bunkers, head through the small gap in the rocks to their left. When you see the sign that points to the storm drain hatch, walk across the field to the tent, take out the troops, go into the concrete bunker, and turn the valve. Head back to the drain hatch sign, and crouch under the rocks into the next area.

Ahh, a minefield! Use your pistol to set 'em off — or just refer to our handy map (Map 1). Step lightly, young Freeman! When you make it to the opposite side, make a jump into the hatch and move on.

The next area is a great place to use your crossbow's sniper scope. Hop down to the ledge on your left and waste the trooper below. Follow the path around the two large pipes and kill the sentry waiting behind them. There's a trooper lurking in a dark cave, so watch out. Slide down the large pipe to the platform below. Kill the trooper located immediately behind you. Keep moving onward. You'll reach a recessed cave and ammo depot where you can grab a guided missile launcher. Head outside and destroy the helicopter with one shot. Head up the red ladders and into the gray pipe (watch out for the headcrab!).

Out of the frying pan, and into the fire! Destroy the troops in the next area



QUESTIONABLE ETHICS: Boy, I'm sure glad that big fellow is trapped behind glass. Too bad you'll have to release him to move on to the next area. But with your expertise and skill, you should be able to fry this guy fairly quickly.

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SURFACE TENSION (MAP 1): This map shows the location of the land mines in the storm drain hatch area. You can use your pistol to set the mines off before proceeding.

SURFACE TENSION: Gordon boogies on up the side of an electrical tower to the roof of the complex...

SURFACE TENSION: ...then drops in to say hello to a fellow scientist.

at your leisure, but remember the M1 tank that's lobbing shells at you. You can load up on health in the area behind the tank, but your main goal is to get to the booth and hit the button to open the metal door. In the next area, you can find a small encampment to the right with some extra goodies. Once you've raided it, dash past the second tank and open the door.

You've now reached the ordnance storage facility. Don't bother walking on to the minefield — take a right, and hop over the claymore. Once you get to the next clearing, there's going to be a sniper waiting for you behind some camo in the burnt-out building. Use a rocket against him, and move on. Set off the mines across the road, then crouch under the barbed wire. Destroy the power generators, then climb up onto the roof. Find the hole with the smoke coming out of it, then drop inside.

The next area is Claymore City, so for the love of Mike, don't set 'em off!

Make your way up the stairs by climbing the railing. In the next room, the first order of business is to oh-so-carefully pull the wooden crate off the elevator. Now head up to the control room, hit the button to signal the elevator, then jump off it, right onto the crate you moved. Now jump over the blue lasers and onto the elevator.

Say hello to the friendly security guard in the basement and grab the Snark. Walk through the tunnel and destroy the sentry in the back of the truck. Head up the ramp and *run like hell* to the back of the building — the incoming monsters will get nuked by F-16s, and you don't want to deal with the tank that's going to come crashing through in a few seconds. Kill the sniper waiting for you behind the building, then enter through the back door. Kill the troopers, and get the security guard to

SURFACE TENSION: Waboom! Nice shot! Taking out this helicopter with the missile launcher is about as easy as killing a daddy longlegs with a sledgehammer.

SURFACE TENSION: As he readies himself to slide down this concrete pole, Gordon wonders why he didn't take up a career in accounting instead. It sure would have been a lot simpler.

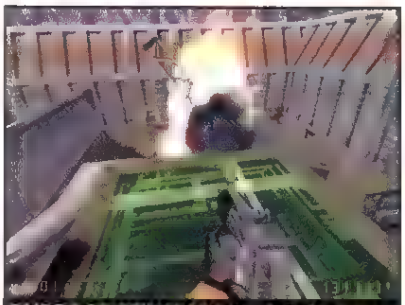
SURFACE TENSION: Look out, it's a headcrab attack! These grunts won't know what hit 'em.

unlock an *amazing* armory on the second floor. When you're done stocking up, hop out the window at the top of the stairs, and climb along the ledge to the right. Jump on to the blue power box, then on to the second power box under the fire escape. Make a running jump on to the red ladder, then head up into the next area. Make your way across the ledges to the open second-story door. Run across the helipad to the dark hangar, then down the ramp. Climb up the green crates, use the stationary gun to blast a hole in the hangar door, and then run through.

It's fun to pick off alien slaves with the stationary gun, but they just keep respawning. Run and launch yourself onto the second level of the destroyed building with the bounce pad. Drop down to where the soldiers are fighting the aliens, then break through the grate and head halfway up the ramp. Dash back down as a slew of critters jump out to get you. Once they explode, head back up and collect the critter packets. Break the grate and let the grunts drop you into the garage. Try to walk out the door, then raise the lift to jump through the hole in the wall. Use the stationary gun to blast a hole in the wall and to kill the four monsters that appear.

Ignore the mayhem in the next room, and jump over the missing chunk of catwalk to the next hallway. Clear out the next area of vermin, then use the bounce pad to get onto the roof. Break through the grate, make your way through the pipe, then double-time it back before the grenade goes off. Once the way is clear, move on through and enjoy the headcrab orgy in the next room. Open up the pipe and crawl through. Kill all opposition in the area below, then climb the stairs and get the guard to open the door for you. Escort him outside, take him to the control booth, and he'll open a second door.

Run in horror from the big blue guy. Use the bounce pad to get on top of the silo, and quickly use the tactical map to target the blue beastie at the gate, then hit the red button in the center to call in the air strike. Now, target and destroy the electrical tower, the wall next to the tower, and the large blast doors. Head across your new homemade bridge into the next episode.



SURFACE TENSION: Punch in the proper coordinates on the tactical map, and you'll be able to make yourself a neat little bridge.

"Forget About Freeman!"

Don't get mooched by the collapsing ceiling. You can tell when a chunk is about to fall — a little debris will drop, so then get out of the way. When a thin piece of the ceiling finally drops, hop on to it to avoid getting crushed by the final chunk. Go to the Lambda complex.

The elevator to the central complex is currently out of commission, so don't give it a second thought. When you're done checking out the office, grab the security guard, head down the ramp, and take a right. From long range, take out the cocoon over the hatch, and wait for the little critters inside to self-destruct. Turn the wheel and head down.

Trash the sentry gun waiting for you in the tunnel. Crouch-jump into the

"FORGET ABOUT FREEMAN!" Give this wheel a turn, then head down into the sewer system. I bet that you're glad you've got that heady-dandy suit on.

"FORGET ABOUT FREEMAN!" When you enter the Lambda complex, *don't* throw the switch to trigger the sentry gun. Your friendly security guard won't appreciate it.

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"FORGET ABOUT FREEMAN!" You should know what to do here without me telling you — just hop into the tank, and fire away. Who needs keys?

"FORGET ABOUT FREEMAN!" Hmm, lots of goo around here. Wish I had my boots.

duct marked *West*. Follow the current, duck under the gears and avoid the steam. Jump over the bunker, kill the trooper, and do your best to avoid the sentry. Head up the ladder, sprint behind the tank, and head into the elevator.

Try to avoid the radioactive goo all over the floor. Head up the stairs, then climb the ladder into the repair bay. Punch the button in the tank to blast through the door, and head through, avoiding the stationary gun.

Lambda Core

Head into the control room, press the button, and get on the elevator. Head up the ladder to the haz-mat bays. It's assassin time again! Toast the girls waiting for you, then take a right, break some barrels, and head up to the second level. There are a total of four assassins in this area, so watch your step! Head across the catwalks and down an elevator to the second haz-mat bay.

Be careful in the next area, as large beasties will keep warping in at opposite sides of the map. Once you've killed five of them, your scientist buddy will let you into the lab. Head up the elevator, but remember to visit the weapons testing lab for a nifty new tool of destruction. When you're ready, head down to the coolant system.

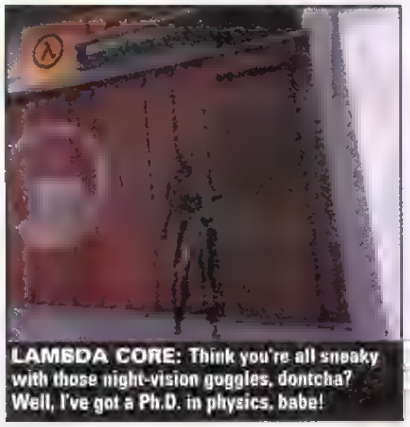
Take a left, then another left, and follow the arrow to the *Maintenance Station*. Load up on ammo and talk to the scientist. Head back to the elevator, and follow the signs to the *01 Coolant System*. Head down the ramp, take a right, then take another right down the ramp. Follow the hallway, and remember that beasties are going to be warping in *all* the time. Once you've reached the first coolant tank, climb the yellow ladder, and keep going until you hit the pump station. Pull the lever to raise the level of coolant. Follow the blue hallway all the way back, then follow the orange hallway to the second coolant system. Crouch to get past the falling rubble. Climb the ladder and make your way to the second pump system (turn the valve to shut off the steam that's in your path). Flick the switch and head all the way back to the start of the map, to the sign that says *Aux Tank Reactor Access*. Dive into the coolant tank and follow the flow tunnel to the main reactor. Throw both valves, then head for the surface

This is where things are going to get hairy. Electricity bolts are shooting out of the reactor in a counter-clockwise motion, so you'll have to time it perfectly as you head up the series of ladders. Once you make it to Level D of the reactor core, take a right. Load up in the supply room, then climb up the elevator shaft to level B. Raid the second supply room, and be on your merry way. Grab the security guard in the room to the right, then take a right down the hallway past a pair of orange pipes. Kill the three monsters waiting for you, then locate the door that reads *Core Level B*.

Here's how the core works. The Orange balls are the *senders* while the green balls are the *receivers*. You'll have to keep tabs on the rotating platforms and time it so that when you jump into the orange ball, the corresponding green ball is lined up with the platform so you'll drop on to it. Teleport onto the first platform. Now, make sure that the green ball is lined up with the second level rotating platform, then jump into *Port 02*. Duck immediately after teleporting so you don't get clipped by the metal bar that swings dangerously close to your head. Jump into *Port 04*, and remember to duck. Finally, jump into *Port 07*.

Oh no, *more* jumping puzzles! This

LAMBDA CORE: Don't let the assassins get too close — but if they do, it's just a bigger target for you.



LAMBDA CORE: Think you're all sneaky with those night-vision goggles, dontcha? Well, I've got a Ph.D. in physics, babe!

LAMBDA CORE: The reactor is going to start shooting out electricity in a clockwise pattern — and since you just jumped out of the water, that's *not* good.

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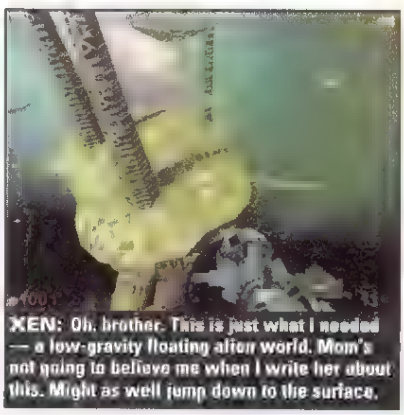
LAMBDA CORE: Quickly pick off the brain-creatures while the old man does his thang. And for pete's sake, don't let him die! You're still going to need the guy after this little stunt.

one requires a good deal of skill and patience — you need to open the center core by pressing two buttons, which are located in recessed rooms on the outside of the ring. Simply hop back and forth between platforms until you can hit both buttons, then crouch-jump into the center. Bingo! Now do an about-face and head out the doorway. Climb the maintenance ladder to Level A. Say hello to the members of the legendary Lambda Lab. *Grab all the ammo you can carry.* Be sure to take the jump packet in the blue chamber.

Head into the test chamber, and keep firing at the brain-creatures that warp in, until the scientist gives you the okay to step into the resonance cascade.

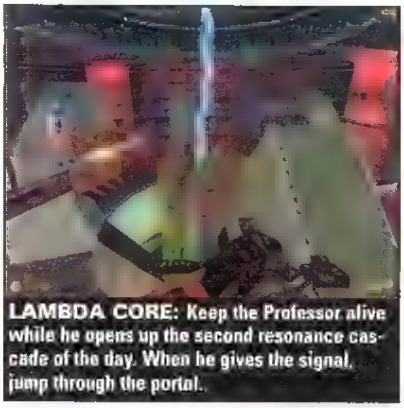


XEN: Oh, brother. This is just what I needed — a low-gravity floating alien world. Mom's not going to believe me when I write her about this. Might as well jump down to the surface.

Xen

Jump down, platform to platform, until you reach the surface of the floating island. Hop down to one of the spikes,

XEN: Once you make it inside the floating island, trigger the four metallic mushrooms and step into the teleporter.



LAMBDA CORE: Keep the Professor alive while he opens up the second resonance cascade of the day. When he gives the signal, jump through the portal.

and you'll reach the lower level. Locate the healing pool, and you'll find a small crack in the wall directly behind it. Crouch and go through. Whack through the organic covering with your crowbar. Stand in front of each of the three mushroom-shaped structures, and hit the use key. Then smash the covering around the fourth structure, and step into the teleporter that appears.

Gonarch's Lair

Gonarch is one freaking ugly, rampaging testicle-rhino, so load up on batteries and start nailing that sucker right in his enormous, pestilent sac. Keep blasting his ugly ass, and he'll keep running away to another area. The final area of Gonarch's Lair gives you a clear shot of his underside, allowing you to pump lead into him while avoiding his little transparent headcrab minions. Once you kill him, pop into the hole that appears.

Interloper

The goal here is to make your way up to the rotating teleport pad. The only way to do this is by using the holes in the ground — drop inside, and you'll be shot

GONARCH'S LAIR: This is Gonarch. "Gonarch" is alien-speak for "Big ugly testicle with legs."

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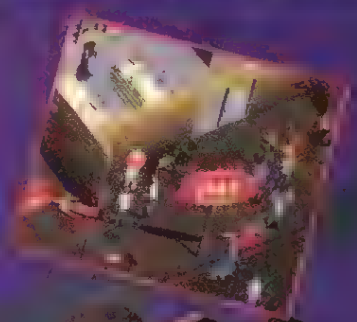

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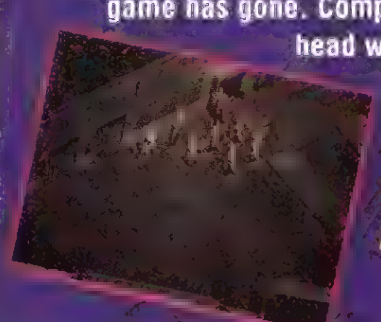

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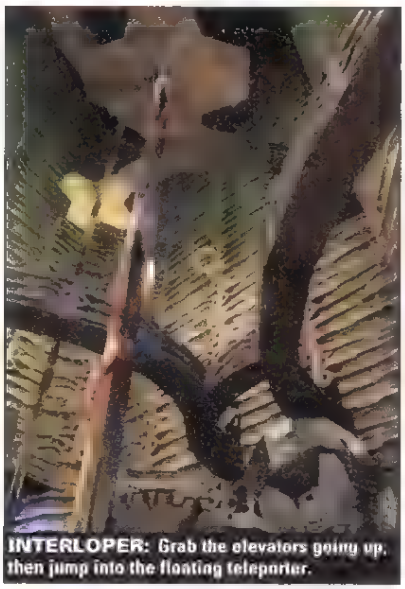
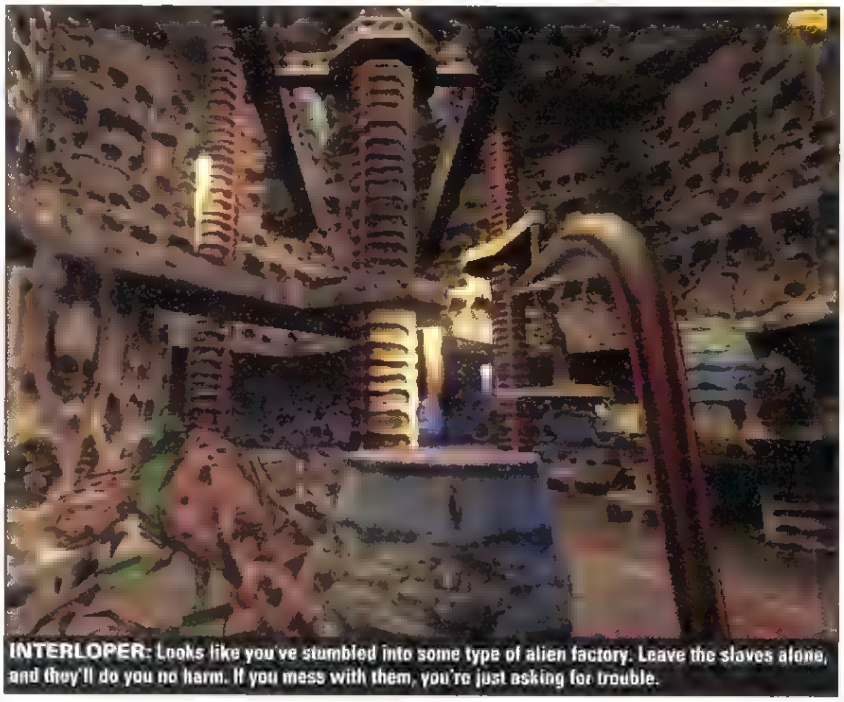


INTERLOPER: Grab the elevators going up, then jump into the floating teleporter.



INTERLOPER: Looks like you've stumbled into some type of alien factory. Leave the slaves alone, and they'll do you no harm. If you mess with them, you're just asking for trouble.

up into the air at full blast. You want to attempt to land on one of the manta-like ships, then hop off on to the pad before it vanishes. This is easier said than done, and it may take you a couple dozen tries before you finally nail it. Be persistent.

Make your way out of the cave and take a left. Make your way around the tentacles. As you move forward, you'll find a purple-lit cave to your right, which holds goodies galore. When you're significantly stocked up, head into the large orange cave, and make your way through the rubble and up the rocks.

Gads — *another* blue beastie! Take an immediate left through another orange passage, and leap over the gaps in the ground. You're not out of the woods yet — there are two friendly tentacles waiting for you. Use the grenade approach to create a sound decoy, then follow the narrow path around them. Take a right when you get to the light-stalk, and enter the teleporter.

In the next area, it would be to your advantage *not* to start killing things. In fact, as long as you don't fire a weapon, the alien slaves won't bother to attack. Make your way up the series of ramps and conveyor belts until you get to the top level. Hop onto the conveyor belt that *doesn't* lead into a blue force field, and you'll be dropped into a pool.

Looks like the aliens are pissed at you again. Hop on the ledge to your right, then walk down the conveyor belt. Once you reach the belt's origin at the force field, take a left and fend off a plethora of bigheaded freaks. Head up the ramps until you find two round platforms pumping up and down. Use these as elevators to reach the next level.

Head into the next room, which is full of barrel-shaped cocoons. It is *very* crucial that you do *not* break these open, unless you want to contend with a rampaging alien warrior. At the end of this hallway is a glowing blue chamber — this is a safety zone where you can heal back up. Now, duck and crawl into the red grates, and drop down to the next level.

This area is very straightforward — just take out all the opposition, and use the rotating elevators to get to the floating teleporter at the top of the shaft. Take care, as alien slaves will teleport in on the elevators. Once you get on the final green elevator, just hop off into the teleporter.

Make your way down the series of rocks, and step into the red light. Scary...

NIHILANTH: Whatcha got? Whatcha got? Trash the glowing orange crystals, and this little bastard is history.

Nihilanth

This is it, baby! And boy, is that one butt-ugly boss. Let's get right down to business: the Nihilanth gets his power from the three glowing orange crystals around the sides of his den. Blast all three of these with rockets — or something equally explosive — and his power supply will be cut off. Circle-strafing around this fellow is the key, and dodging behind the spikes will block his green teleporter energy balls, which will transport you to mildly annoying mini-puzzle areas. Once he's wasted all of his energy tossing those teleporters at you, his noggin will crack open. Use the jump pads to get to the ledge overlooking the arena to access a healing pool — and to get a good shot at the inside of his head.

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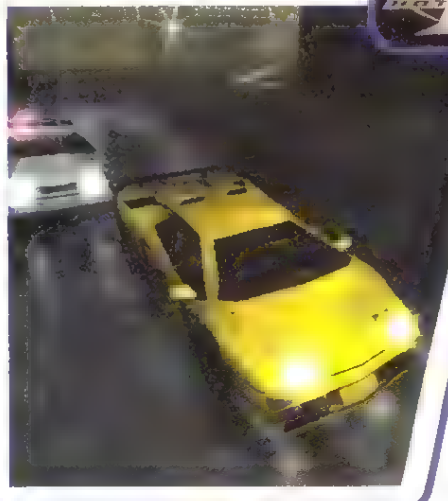

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Heretic II, Part 1

Get ready for some top-drawer tips, straight from the developers

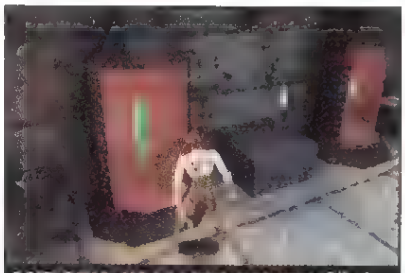
To help with your adventures through Raven Software's *Heretic II*, we present you with the first half of our two-part strategy guide. We've skipped the first five levels, which basically train you for the dangers that lie ahead, and start you out in the land of Andoria. Check back next issue for the heart-stopping conclusion!

Andoria Healer's Tower

Immediately in front of you is a sealed door and a statue. If you listen to his message, you will find you can't get past here until you give him something: the Warrior's Shield. Take the exit to the next room with the lift in the center. Jump on the lift to ride it down, then press the button on the wall next to it. This will send bars out of the wall to attach the lift to the seal on the floor. Once the lift returns to the top, there will be a stairway leading down. Follow this to the end, and you will find a broken tomb. Press the small shell on the wall and the large shell will open to reveal the Warrior's Shield.

Return to the door at the beginning of the level and give the shield to the statue to open the door. Inside you will find the Storm Bow. Upon retrieving it, the walls will open to a large room. Drop into the water to make it down safely. Under the bridge leading out of the room is a button to retract the gate blocking the door. Follow this passage around until you come to a room with a hole in the ceiling. Pull the levers on each side of the room to open the center relief, then pull the lever inside to raise the water level of the room. Swim to the hole in the ceiling and climb into the small pipe. Follow this around until you are inside the city of Andoria.

There are two shell reliefs on the floor to the left and right of the guardian statues that, when pressed, open a section of wall to reveal levers. These levers will turn the statues, allowing you entrance to the Healer's Tower. Follow the passages and you will meet Siernan, the Ssithra Healer. Upon listening to what he has to say, you will be given the task of retrieving a Crystal from the Academic Quarter and a Vial of Earthblood from the Slums. Exit Siernan's room to the left and make your way around the tower to a door. This leads to the Plaza.



ANDORIA HEALER'S TOWER: All of your item collecting comes to fruition when creating the potion here in Siernan's lab.

Upon returning with the Crystal and Earthblood, Siernan will be lying on the floor, having been attacked. He will ask you to make the potion of the cure yourself. Take the small lift up to the next floor and place the items inside the copper tubes. The potion will appear in the center. Take it to Siernan and use it on him. Although you haven't been cured of the plague, he will tell you to see the High Priestess of K'Chekrik. Siernan will open a portal to the Kell Caves.

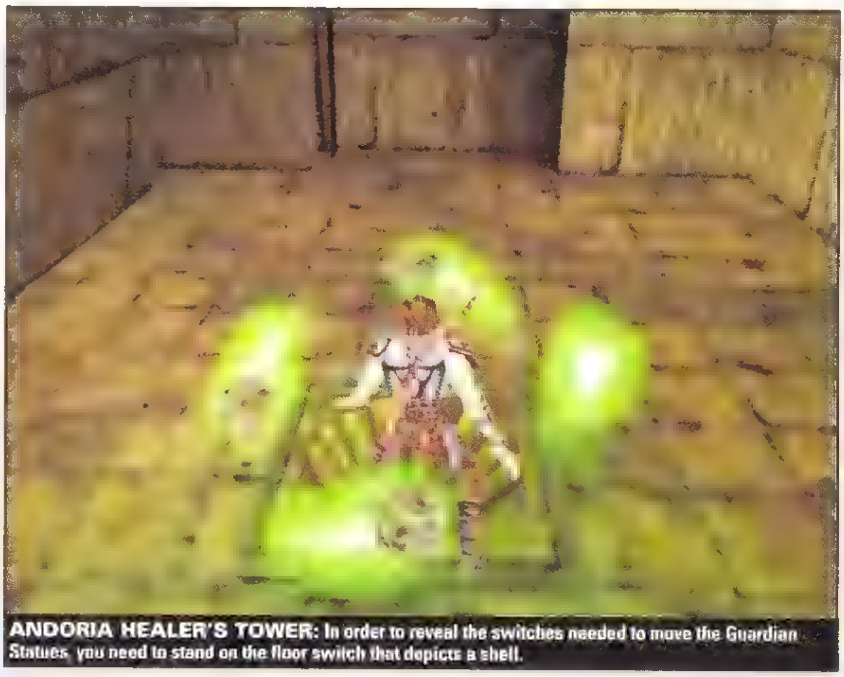
ANDORIA HEALER'S TOWER: Throw the switches to open the door to the Inner City.

ANDORIA PLAZA: To retrieve the empty container and open the door back to the Slums, you need to climb up on to the ledge.

Andoria Plaza

Immediately upon starting this area, you will see the Morph Ovum in front of you. Grabbing it will cause the floor to break, dumping you in the water. Swim under to the next room and make your way to the door. Behind you is a button to open the door. As you make your way through the hall, both doors will close and the floor will open to a trap. After defeating the Ssithra, press the button in the pit to open the doors. From the central plaza, take the door to the left. Cross the bridge and take the street around the buildings until you come to an alley. Follow the alley into the building at the end. Enter the large courtyard and take the door to the left. Following the hall to the next room, you will see a large pillar. Go to the other side and you will see water being held inside of it. Enter the water and swim down to the Academic Quarter.

Upon returning from the Academic Quarter, swim to the very top of the water column and jump across to the hall on the top. Follow this hall around and you will find yourself above the courtyard. Go through the door here and cross the water to the passage. Follow the hall to the top of the central plaza. Go through the door on the opposite side and take the hall to the end. Go to the left and out



ANDORIA HEALER'S TOWER: In order to reveal the switches needed to move the Guardian Statues, you need to stand on the floor switch that depicts a shell.

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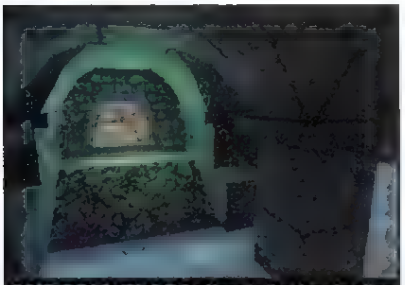


ANDORIA PLAZA: Here is the door leading to the Andoria Slums. Get yourself prepared for battle before stepping through this passage.

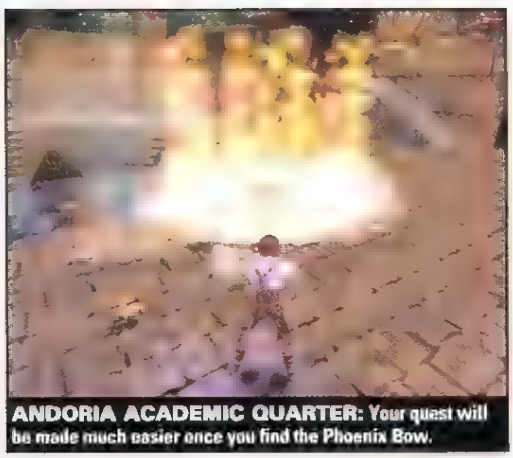
the door. Either drop down through the hole, or swim down through the water to the room below. Exit the room and go left into the building at the end. To the left are fallen blocks. Climb on them and press the button on the ledge. It will open a section of wall to reveal an empty container. Grab the container and press the button behind it to open the door near the pillars. Exit here and go through the next building to the Slums.

Upon returning from the Slums, retrace your steps back to the room with the large pool and steps leading out of it. Jump down into the pool and swim under to return to the beginning of the level. Go through the door to return to the Healer's tower.

Andoria Academic Quarter

Swim to the surface, make your way to the bottom of the room, and exit to the right. In the hallway, shoot the blocks on the left to destroy them and open a way into a room with pillars sticking out of the water. Jump across to the door on the opposite side and go to the right. Jump into the small pool on the left, swim down to the bottom, press the button, and exit the pool. Exit through the door and go through the door straight ahead. There is an identical pool to the one in the previous room that also contains a button. Press it, then return to the small room in between the two doors. The end door is now open.

You are now standing in a large amphitheater. There are two doors across from you and one below. Go through one of the two doors opposite you. Inside this room, take the ramp to the top and go through the door. Pull the lever in front of you and the large contraption in the center of the amphitheater will open, revealing the Phoenix Bow. Pick up the Phoenix Bow, and the door near it will unlock. Enter this room, and swim down into the hall below. Cross the room with the water falling from the ceiling and follow the passage around. You will come to a room with a large crystal floating in the center of the room. Pick up the crystal and a door will slide open revealing a shrine. This is a Staff Shrine that will power up your staff to the second level. Take the hall opposite the one you came in and go to the room at the end. Swim up to the top and pull the lever to open the gate in front of you. You are now at the beginning and can swim down to return to the Plaza.



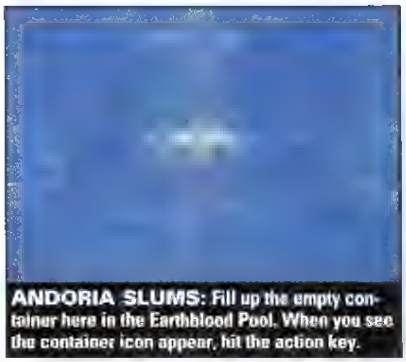
ANDORIA ACADEMIC QUARTER: Your quest will be made much easier once you find the Phoenix Bow.

ANDORIA SLUMS: When you inevitably encounter the Ssithra boss, the best way to defeat him is by using a Tomed-up Red Rain Bow. Once he's been vanquished, you'll see a door open up behind him.

Andoria Slums

You start in a small room with a break in the floor leading to an underwater maze. There are two ways through. Take the first passage to the right and you will come to a large open area with many Ssithra waiting to attack you. The second way is more dangerous to swim, but will allow you to avoid the ambush. Use the Lungs Shrine before entering the water. Swim straight ahead, then left at the end, then left again, then left and up. You will end up in a small room.

Follow the hall out and you will be in the same open courtyard that the passage to the right led to, but now you can avoid the Ssithra. Go through the building in the center and then to your left. Here, you will get the firewall spell. A wall at the end of the hall will break from the pressure plate under the firewall, opening to a rundown set of buildings. Drop down and go to the left. The passage will be knee-deep with water and lead to another open, but rundown, area. Here you will have to confront a large Mutant Ssithra to progress.



ANDORIA SLUMS: Fill up the empty container here in the Earthblood Pool. When you see the container icon appear, hit the action key.

Upon his defeat a door at the far end opens. When you go inside the roof will cave in, but you'll be able to climb to the hall above. Take this hall, then go to the right. Jump in the water below and swim down through the submerged hall. In the room is an Earthblood pool. Use the container to take some of the Earthblood. Swim to the surface and exit the room. Use the Lungs Shrine and enter the water. Swim ahead and hit the lever on the wall. When the gate opens, swim to the left, then right, and continue to the end where you will be in the same room that you started in. Exit through the door to return to the Plaza.

Kell Caves

Follow the stone walkway out of the cave and follow it to the large cavern. Stop and wait for the earthquake to finish, and jump over the hole created in the bridge.

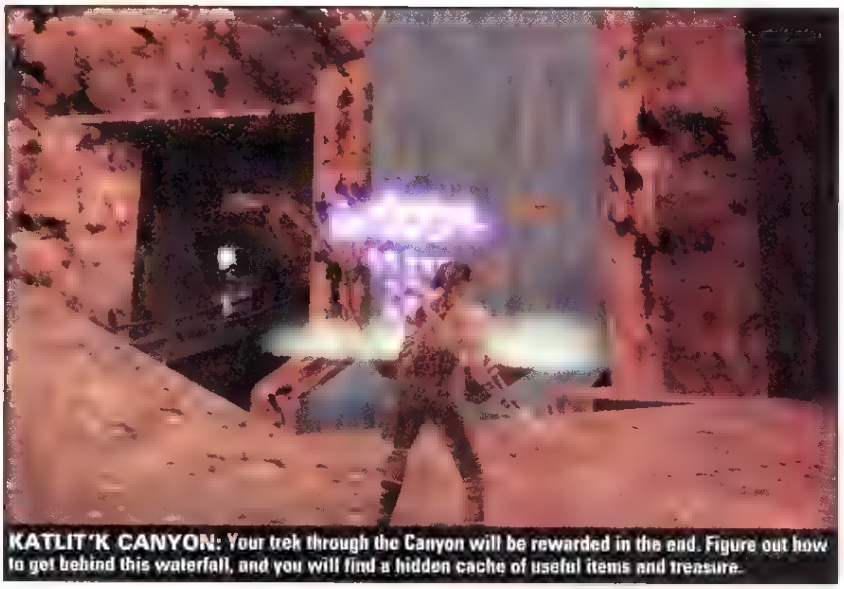
KELL CAVES: As you make your way through the dank and dreary Caves, be on the look out for air pockets to replenish your supply.

Continuing on, there is a hall to the left and right. Take the left hallway, being careful not to get hit by the spikes. As you round the corner, you will come up a small set of stairs into a room. Take the stairs to the right down to the water. Swim to the half-submerged room. In the right corner on the far end of the room, there is a block under the water. Climb on the block, then jump onto the block with the lever on it. The lever opens the door under the water. Swim through and follow the passage.

There are air pockets scattered along the passage, so be sure to stop from time to time. You will come to a section where there is another earthquake and part of the ceiling caves in. You can return to the bridge room from here, but it is not necessary. Soon after, you will come to a large cave. Make your way to the far end, then climb to the top and take the passage there. At the end, you will have to crouch and roll through a hole. The caverns will cave in, blocking you from returning, but allowing access to the canyon.

Katlit'k Canyon

Exiting the tunnel, there are two ways to go. The first is to jump into the water at the end of the canyon and swim into the cave underneath. The other way is to climb the ledge to your right and jump across to the passage on the left. Follow it around and drop into the cave from above. Exiting the cave, you will see another large canyon. Near the end, on the left, climb the ledges up to the top. Pole-vault across the canyon to the cave near the top. Follow the cave around and climb to the top of the open area beyond it. Here you will meet the Scout. He tells you of the K'Chekrik and that to see the High Priestess you must enter the Warrior's Gauntlet. Take the passage next to him and follow it around until you come to a broken bridge. Pole-vault over the bridge and take the passage to the bridge up above. Pole-vault over this bridge and follow the passage to a canyon with a bridge and a large waterfall. Go across the bridge to pick up the Sphere of Annihilation. Continue on to a cavern with one side broken in. Climb to the top and take the passage to a narrow crevasse. At the end, you will come to a large clearing.



KATLIT'K CANYON: Your trek through the Canyon will be rewarded in the end. Figure out how to get behind this waterfall, and you will find a hidden cache of useful items and treasure.

KATLIT'K CANYON: There are two ways to get through the Canyon; jump right in and swim, or climb the ledges to stay high and dry.

KATLIT'K CANYON: Those gears below are quite proficient at making Elf-hamburger, so make sure that when you jump, you aim for the pool and give a wide berth to the spinning wheels.

Go to the far end of the clearing and drop down into the cave below. Here you will find an underground lake. Across the cave under the water is a passage. Swim to the passage and follow it out of the water. At the end is a drop-off. You can see a giant set of gears turning. Jump into the water below, being careful to avoid hitting the gears. Go to the end of the canyon and follow the passage around to the next clearing. This is the entrance to the city of K'Chekrik. Defeat the guards and get the Hive Key. Use the key on the door to enter the Hive.

Boss Strategy for Andoria

The Giant Ssithra doesn't move much, but that doesn't mean killing him will be all that easy. The best strategy is to power up your weapons and fire a barrage of Storm Arrows at him. Use the rubble on the ground as a barricade to avoid his explosive arrows. Fire at him when he stops to reload.

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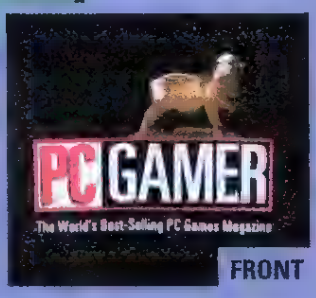

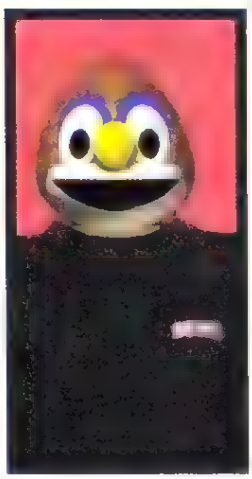

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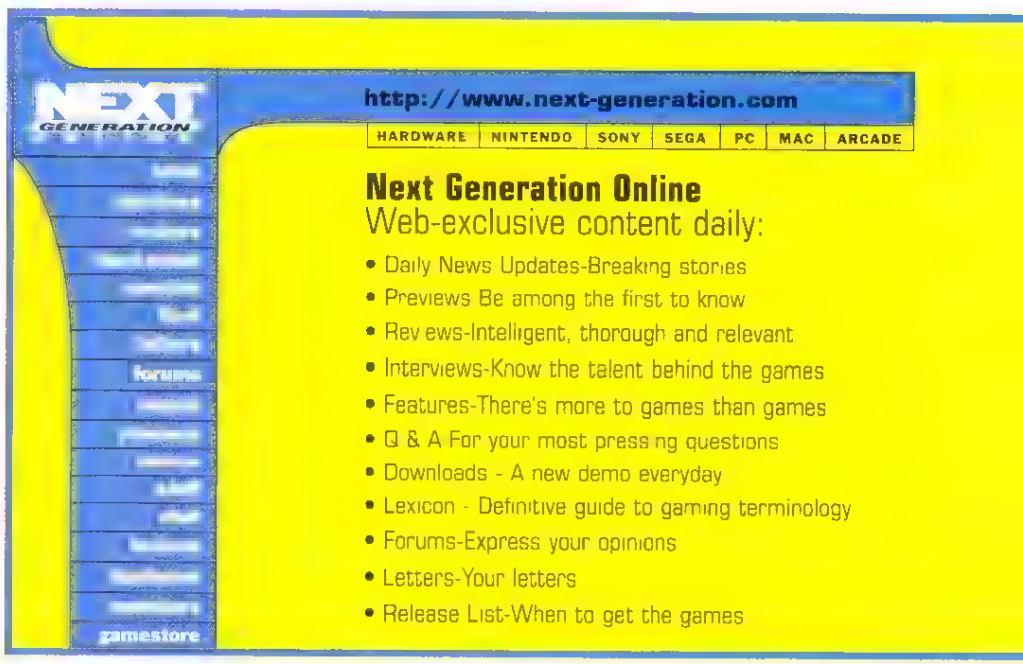

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LETTERS

This year's *PC Gamer* Awards are official — and we *know* you don't agree with all of 'em. So you've got no excuse not to write us a long, rambling tirade about why *Paintbrawl eXtreme* is a masterpiece that should've been Game of the Year, *Half-Life* stinks because it doesn't have chickens in it, and *Quake II* should've won even though it came out in 1996. Come on — let us have it!

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In Defense of Ads

I am tired of hearing that your magazine has too many advertisements. Advertisements of upcoming products and games are definitely cool to look at and read. Unlike TV commercials, which bombard the viewer with unwanted and intelligence-insulting crap, I enjoy and want to see for myself what is in store for the pleasures of pure gaming goodness

— Michael M. Bierce, *via the Internet*

Thanks, Michael. We like you. We really do.

Whither Gravy?

A woman came into my Electronics Boutique store the other day and asked, quite seriously, "Do you have the Coconut Monkey game?" My manager and I looked at each other and tried not to laugh as we politely told her that Coconut Monkey was a magazine's mascot, not a game — although you joke about his own game, *Gravy Trader*, coming out. She was puzzled by this and ended up buying the expansion pack for *Battlezone*. Seeing as there is a high demand, when is *Gravy Trader* going to be released?

— René Valen, *Electronics Boutique, Vancouver, Canada*

Well, René, you're probably aware that Coconut Monkey originally set May 21, 1999, as the release date for the long-awaited Gravy Trader *— but rumor has it he may delay the release yet again to avoid taking the spotlight away from a certain movie that's being released on the same day. "Coconut Monkey has had a very close friendship with George Lucas since CM doubled for Yoda in* The Empire Strikes Back," *says industry analyst Chip Elko. "I wouldn't be surprised if he throws Lucas a bone when May 21 rolls around."*

The pulse-pounding (and artery-clogging) high point of Bucket Week: an honest-to-goodness bucket full of Popcorn Chicken!

Bucket Week

In a recent issue (December 1998), I read your reviews introduction page and noticed an article about eating some tender fried chicken. Your employees, being my role models, inspired me and made me decide to attempt a similar challenge. The results were grim. My poor brother nearly died from his clogged arteries, and I gained 30 pounds. You should warn people before they attempt such feats of courage that only adults who play PC games all day should try. Also, I have been playing games such as *Doom* and *Half-Life* (which should have been your first-ever 100 percent rating) for a long time, and I have never felt like going on a killing spree, at least not yet.

— Smoothmo D., *via the Internet*

Sorry about that, D. That reviews intro page originally carried a warning — "Bucket Week should not be attempted by pregnant women, people with heart conditions, or normal human beings" — but it had to be cut so we could include a picture of Colonel Sanders' obscenely delicious fried chicken. We think we made the right choice.

Drink the Monkey

I just wanted to send you a note about Coconut Monkey...the drink. I was out at one of our favorite clubs the other day, and I went up to the bartender and asked for a Coconut Monkey drink. He sort of contorted his face all up like I knew he would and said, "Never heard of it." To which I replied, "Infidel *dog*! Your flesh shall rot and your eyes will boil for your ignorance."

But I said it in Greek, which sounds, coincidentally, like, "No prob; I have the recipe," in English. So I whip out the recipe (which, yes, I carry with me at all times) and hand it over to the infidel dog tending bar. He did that contorted face thing again and said, "Are you serious?" To which I responded, "Make it or I will shove that bottle of Absolut up your @$$ sideways," in Greek again, which came out sounding like, "Yes." (It's amazing we haven't had an international outrage over this little bit of linguistic oddness, isn't it?)

So he tells me that they have no coconut milk. I ask if they have anything that *tastes* like coconut milk (read: Malibu Rum); he says no. Then his infidel bartending buddy says they do have Coconut Rum. I say, "Close enough," and sigh. They then proceeded to mug me for like $10 for the drink (I don't know about your town...but here in Philly, $5 is about as much as you pay for a drink, unless there is a special occasion). I then brought my hard-earned drink out to the fire to share with my friends.

Now, correct me if I am wrong... but I swear it generated its own light! (I admit that it may have been the light of the fire shining through the drink's lovely blue-green liquid.) We drank, and it was true bliss! So tangy, so sweet, so much alcohol! My friend, who drank only a shot, almost went blind and saw visions of his mother beckoning him on to heaven (she lives in Warrington, PA, which is a *long* way from heaven).

The effects of drinking most of the glass weren't apparent to me until later, when I learned that I could phase through matter (or that I had lost my depth perception, and I was nowhere near that chair I was aiming for). The moral of the story is...thanks, you have given me my new favorite drink. I look forward to the day I can mix a pitcher of it up (that is, when I can afford the $100-plus it will cost to buy the ingredients for a whole pitcher) and spring it on my unsuspecting party guests.

— Bryan Becker, *Philadelphia, PA*

Not a Fan

I used to think you guys at *PC Gamer* had a pretty good magazine, and then I

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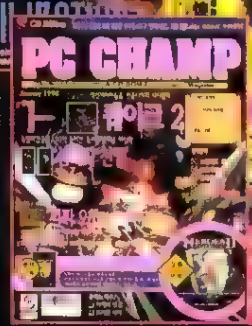
We're Worldwide, Baby!

As I travel the globe for my business, I've noticed some international magazines that seem to be affiliated with you guys somehow. Do you have international issues of *PC Gamer*? Just curious.

— Benny Optimus, *New York, NY*



It's true, Benny; PC Gamer is loved in many languages. Magazines in Australia, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Italy, Finland, the Philippines, Spain, and Thailand have signed up to bring Gaming Goodness to the four corners of the earth. (Ironically, the UK PC Gamer, published by Future, isn't affiliated with us.)

You *PC Gamer* folks won't believe this. While on my honeymoon in the beautiful Cayman Islands, I stopped in a tiny gas station for a Coke. They had a tiny little newsstand with only five magazines on display — two of which were the CD-ROM and "Solo" editions of *PC Gamer*. So here's my question: Is *PC Gamer* a warm-water publication?

— Karl Gehlen, *via the Internet*

Funny you should ask that. We certainly prefer tropical climes ourselves, but we recently found evidence that the U.S. edition of PC Gamer *can also survive in the icy North Sea. Check out the picture on the right!*

started reading it a little bit more, and I discovered most of you are morons...

Well, folks, you've got to love a letter that starts like this. It can only get better from here, right? Let's read on.

...but don't worry — it's not just you guys, it is most people involved with computer games.

Okay, so this reader isn't singling us out as morons — he means the whole industry. That's better

Every time I read about a good gaming machine, you try and make it sound like it's a bargain. A console system costs about $120 now and you don't have to worry about changing system requirements, but for a computer, you spend at least $1,000; if you only spend the minimum, your system is out of date before the end of the year. You act like people can afford to constantly upgrade their PC every two months, and they can't.

No, we act like the people who love PC games upgrade their systems every couple of years, because most of them do.

Just go out and buy a console system, and don't worry about upgrading every couple of months.

Yes, and don't worry about playing Rainbow Six, *or* Half-Life, *or* Falcon 4.0, *or* Grim Fandango *— because you won't be able to.*

Computer games are getting very stupid; the only ones you give good ratings anymore are first-person shooters that have steep system requirements, and they have all of the lame bells and whistles that use every little bit of power a machine has. There are the occasional exceptions to this, but it is almost always the first-person shooters that get above a 90 percent rating.

Well, now that's just plain wrong. Take a look at our reviews of Klingon Honor Guard *and* Trespasser *in the January 1999 issue. Now look at the reviews of* Caesar III, Grim Fandango, *and* Links LS 1999 *in that same issue.*

I have more that I would like to complain about, but I think that is enough.

— Nate, *via the Internet*

Yeah. We think that's enough, too. Look: At least once a year, we get one of these "why doesn't everybody just buy a videogame console?" letters. This is the first one to label everyone involved with computer gaming a moron, but otherwise it's pretty familiar. Believe it or not, we know there are videogame consoles out there that cost less than $200. Our readers know it, too. But since we're interested in more than racing games and fighting games, consoles don't really cut it for us. And the PC gaming industry exists — and grows every year — because a whole lot of people feel the same way. We've got nothing against videogame consoles or videogame players. We don't have anything against Hanson or Celine Dion, either. We just prefer to spend our time and money on different things.

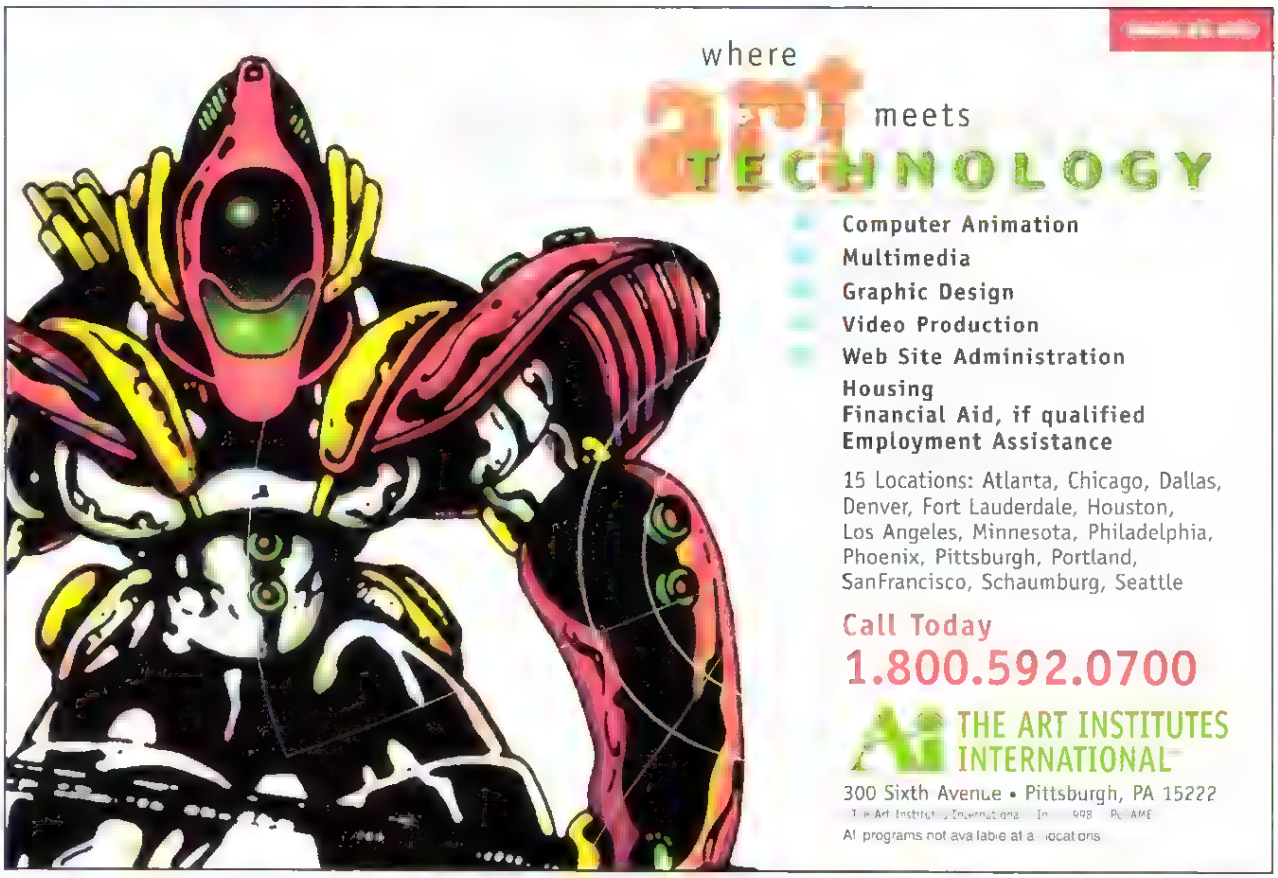
Bzzzt!

I found an interesting typo in the *Trespasser* review in the January 1999 issue. This one really caught my attention. "...dinosaurs, guns, and large **breasts**, brought to life...". Oops! Hehehe.

— Robert B., *via the Internet*

Oops yourself, Robert. That's no typo; the word was not supposed to be "beasts," although you're not the only reader who assumed it was Grab a copy of Trespasser, *fire it up, and look down. You'll see what we mean.* PCG

In our review of *Trespasser*, if we had *meant* "large beasts," we would've *said* "large beasts." We said "breasts," and we meant it. See what we mean?



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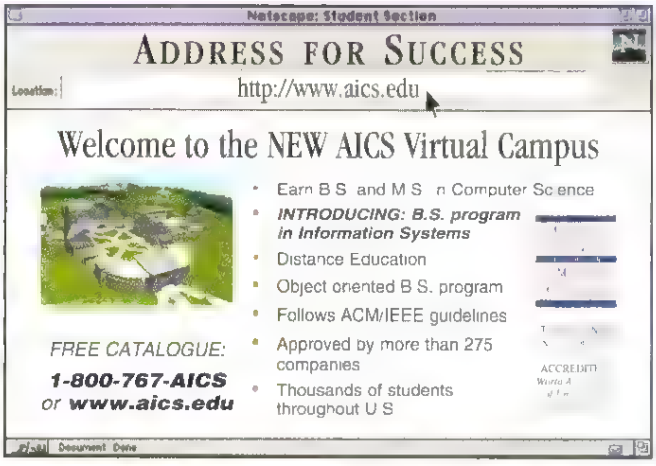

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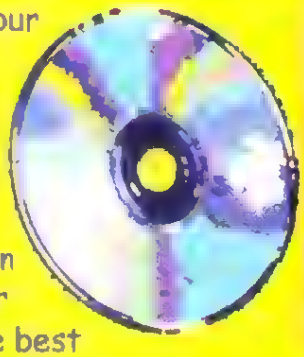

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NEXT TIME...

Uh-oh, time's up. But never fear! We'll be back in just 30 short days from now with another nutritious helping of Gaming Goodness.

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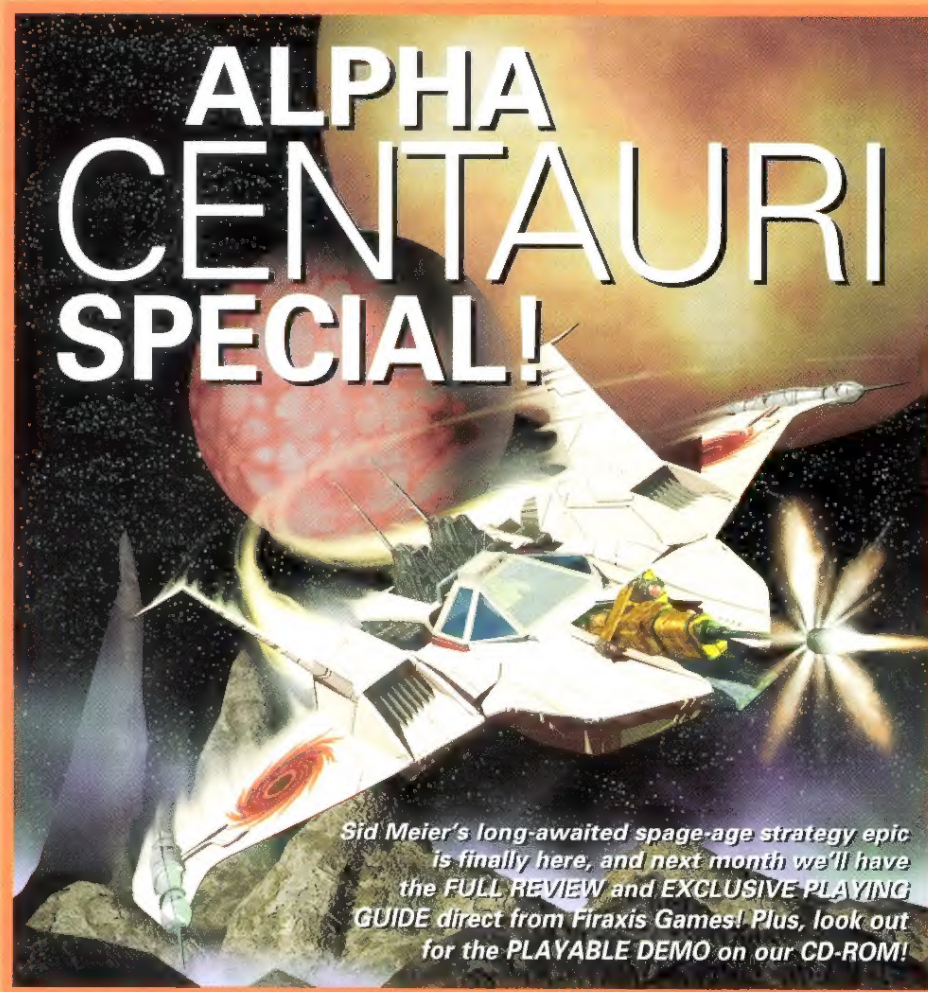
ALPHA CENTAURI SPECIAL!
Sid Meier's long-awaited spage-age strategy epic is finally here, and next month we'll have the FULL REVIEW and EXCLUSIVE PLAYING GUIDE direct from Firaxis Games! Plus, look out for the PLAYABLE DEMO on our CD-ROM!

AGE OF EMPIRES II

The sequel to Microsoft's real-time blockbuster is taking shape, and we'll have an EXCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT REPORT from Ensemble Games and an interview with its creator, Bruce Shelley.

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Thanks for joining us.

Jay came face to face with Death. She wasn't as pretty as he thought she would be — he was expecting a perky, dark-haired nymph. Instead, Death looked tired, with dark circles under her eyes and the stub of a second-hand cigarette hanging from her cracked lips.

Death gave Jay the once over, her gaze noticing the angels imprinted on his boots and the dark clothes. She smiled and said, "So, are you ready, then?"

Jay swallowed hard, unable to respond. Finally, he found his voice and said, "Are you the real deal, or is this some kind of joke?"

Death laughed — the kind of laugh that only means one thing. "Come with me," she said, holding out her deathly white hands.

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